

**VETERANS MEMORIAL ISLAND SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, January 3, 2024 – 9:30 a.m.
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

PRESENT: Chairman, John Matthews; Members: Curtis Paulisin, Melissa Arndt, and Carolyn Lange **Also Present:** Assistant City Engineer, Danessa Chambers; City Attorney, John Turner and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Unexcused Absence: Michelle Dale

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Matthews called today's meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Committee members and the audience joined together in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) December 6, 2023

Mr. Paulisin said he noticed one (1) correction in the December minutes. The name of the Golf Tournament should be *Veterans of Indian River County Golf Tournament*, not the Vietnam Veterans.

Mr. Matthews made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2023 Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee meeting as corrected. Mrs. Lange seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Matthews stated that he would like to discuss item 6-B) at this time.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

5. NEW BUSINESS

This item was discussed after 6-B).

Mr. Matthews announced that they received an application from the Indian River County Victim Rights Coalition to use the Island for their vigil on April 27, 2024. They have been holding this service on the Island for years and it is appropriate to honor those victims of crime on Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary.

Mr. Matthews made a motion to accept the application from the Indian River County Victim Rights Coalition to use the Island. Mr. Paulisin seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

6. OLD BUSINESS

A) Update on the Bridge Replacement and Reopening Date

Mrs. Danessa Chambers, Public Works Assistant City Engineer, said this morning the City is doing the final walkthrough of the bridge with the contractor and the engineer. She said unless something is uncovered during the walkthrough, the outstanding items are to seal the stamped concrete on the bridge, remove the extra materials, and remove the fence so it can be opened to the public. They do not have an exact opening date because they are waiting for the subcontractor to seal the concrete. After that, the only item outstanding will be the lighting. They had a huge delay in procuring the light poles and they will not be available until April.

Mr. Matthews asked if the arms that close off the bridge were replaced or are they using the original ones.

Mrs. Chambers replied that the gates and the plaque were all sent out to be refurbished so they look fresh and new. She said when the Island is reopened the ground will not look great aesthetically because the City chose to resod the Island utilizing City employees instead of having the contractor do it.

Mr. Matthews stated that the new bridge should last another 50 to 100 years.

Mrs. Chambers explained that they did not even reach the full life expectancy of the old bridge due to the salt water and the harsh environment. The new bridge design has an extra concrete coating around the upgraded steel rebar so it should reach its full design life this time.

B) Update on the Stage and World War II Tribute

This item was discussed after item 3-A).

Mr. Dale Pierce, Bill Bryant and Associates, stated that he previously worked with his two (2) brothers at Pierce and Associates for 35 years but he is now helping Bill Bryant with the World War II (WWII) Tribute. He said the plans had to be changed a little due to comments from the Building Department. The changes were made and they were resubmitted so hopefully that will speed up the permit process because their goal is to start construction as soon as possible. The WWII Tribute Committee is working on fundraising and they are making progress. He explained that the construction is going to be complicated simply because of the location. They are working on the logistics of getting the materials onto the Island the simplest way while protecting the existing walkways and stamped concrete. They are not sure if they will be required to have a construction fence around the work site for liability issues and to keep the public away from the area. He said Mr. Jeff Ray completed the architectural drawings and Mr. Bill Stoddard, Schulke, Bittle, & Stoddard, did all the structural components. The WWII Tribute Committee's goal is to have it constructed by Memorial Day 2024 and they are on board with trying to meet that deadline. He said even if it is not fully complete, some of the adornments that go on the structure could be done after Memorial Day. The main items are the concrete, masonry, electrical, and stucco work.

Mrs. Lange asked what are the dimensions of the stage.

Mr. Pierce stated that he does not have the exact dimensions but it's wider than the circle on the Island, so it is pretty significant in size.

Mr. Matthews stated that they based the size on how many people they usually have on the stage for the ceremonies, previous memorial services, and the size of the stages they used in the past.

Mrs. Barbara Ruddy, WWII Tribute Committee Member, stated that the stage will accommodate 24 people.

Mr. Pierce explained that there are beams in the ground to support the stage because the ground is mushy on the Island. The architect and the engineers had to take into account that the Island could get flooded in a storm, so they needed to make sure the structure was sound. There will be a tree garden behind the stage along with other landscaping. There is a sound system on the Island and it will be centrally located at the back of the stage so when there are events microphones or other equipment can be easily plugged in. There are flags behind the stage that have complex metal supports, so those might be done afterwards if they are not to that point by Memorial Day. He stated that the budget for the project is around \$600,000. This is a complicated structure and there are a lot of components going into it. They will be using black granite, bronze cast WWII adornments, coquina stone to give it a Florida look, and it will be coated with stucco to create a nice finish.

Mrs. Lange stated that people can go to the Cultural Council of Indian River County's website to see their progress and to make donations.

Mrs. Bethany Fortunato, WWII Tribute Committee Member, stated that they will soon be holding some fundraising parties as well as a concert. She said there are four (4) large pillars on the back of the stage and four (4) smaller pillars on the front that will display the medallions. She thought that perhaps they could offer to sell them. The cost for a set of a large and a small column would be \$50,000. She explained that there will be a QR code on the kiosk for people to scan which will take them to the Cultural Council's website. The website will have videos of family members of the WWII Veterans who are honored on the Island as well as WWII Veterans who still reside in Indian River County. They were thinking that the families who sponsor the pillars could also be recognized on the website.

Mr. Matthews said that the kiosk is something new so they will need to see if that would be appropriate. They will need to know who would approve it, will the other monuments on the Island have their own QR code, and who would determine what is appropriate.

Mrs. Lange asked since there are four (4) sets of pillars, can the families who purchase them have the name of the WWII Veteran they are in honoring engraved on the medallions.

Mrs. Fortunato replied no. That is not allowed per the rules of the City.

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, said if they use the tribute to acknowledge the sponsors that is not keeping with the rules and the use of Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary.

Mr. Paulisin said that is correct, they cannot have individuals recognized on the Island.

Mr. Matthews explained that the only people who can be recognized and memorialized on Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary are those who joined the military service as a resident of Indian River County and died while in service of the Country.

Mrs. Fortunato said that is why they thought about using the website. The QR code will be on the Island but it will take people to the Cultural Council's website where they will recognize the contributors.

Mr. Turner said if this involves the City of Vero Beach or the Island then the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee should make a recommendation to City Council if they feel this is a good way to handle recognizing the contributors or they can wait to see how this turns out and see what is presented.

Mr. Matthews said it might be a little early to go to City Council with a recommendation. Once they add a QR code then everyone will want to add one and who is going to control what is said or who will be mentioned. Does this mean anyone who donates \$50,000 could be recognized on a QR code.

Mr. Paulisin stated that this is a big deviation from their rules.

Mr. Matthews stated that there is a lot to consider because this same thing could be proposed for the other monuments on the Island. Would the City Council have to approve everything that is connected to the QR codes, what would be allowed or not allowed, who would be responsible for it, etc.

Mrs. Fortunato said she understood and that the WWII Tribute Committee needs to come back with a plan.

Mr. Matthews said they have to think of the other memorials on the Island as well. They have not included any recognition on a website or on the Island of the people who donated to them.

Mr. Paulisin said in his opinion they need more information to discuss this further. He is leaning towards not allowing it because they should not deviate from their bylaws. The Island is for the people who are honored there.

Mrs. Fortunato said the way she understood the bylaws is that no individual names are to be on the Island except those with cenotaphs.

Mr. Matthews said he understands that this would be helpful for the fundraising but it would also be helpful for the Veterans Memorial Island Committee to be equipped to handle situations like this in the future. He is not sure if this would be a loophole that would allow someone to promote their cause through a QR code.

Mrs. Lange stated that there are a lot of families here that we all know but a lot of this history is not taught through the schools. She thinks it would be nice for future generations to be able to see the families who helped with creating the memorial for this war.

Mr. Paulisin stated that there are other ways to thank the donors without overstepping their boundaries.

Mr. Matthews said it would ultimately be City Council's decision but the Committee needs more information to be able to make a recommendation. They should give it some thought and discuss it again at their next meeting.

C) Recap of National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Ceremony

Mr. Matthews explained that the Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Ceremony recently took place at the Heritage Center. He said that the Heritage Center was originally the United Service Organizations (USO) building during WWII and the Airport was the Naval Air Station used to train pilots going to war.

7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

Mr. Matthews said once they can get back on the Island they will have a memorial service for Private Bakari Mosley. Private Mosley is the most recent Indian River County Veteran to be honored with a cenotaph marker on Veterans Memorial Island. They will notify the family so they can have military honors and an appropriate ceremony for him.

Mr. Matthews said that Wreaths Across America did not place wreathes on the Island this year but they did place a few near the Words From War Monument and at all of the cemeteries in Indian River County.

Mr. Matthews announced that they each received a copy of a letter from a gentleman who was in the Merchant Marines Academy (attached to the original minutes). He wrote to suggest that a monument be created for the 142 cadets who died while serving on United States Merchant Ships. He explained that the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is designed to make recommendations on memorials that are presented to them, not create them. These 142 cadets deserve to be recognized but there is now a monument on the Island honoring all Merchant Marines who served in WWII and the new WWII Memorial which will also include all of these cadets.

Mr. Paulisin suggested inviting him to a future meeting to see what he has in mind.

Mr. Matthews stated that out of respect for him submitting the letter, he would reach out to him. If he would like to talk to the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee he will invite him to a meeting.

8. MEMBER'S MATTERS

Mr. Rob Medina, Representative from Congressman Bill Posey's office, said he is encouraged by all the leadership of the Veterans Memorial Island Committee and the WWII Tribute Committee. That was a very healthy discussion about the WWII Tribute and it is great that they are keeping the bylaws for the Island in the forefront. That is what leadership looks like so he would like to thank them all for serving the community.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) February 7, 2024

The next meeting of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is scheduled for February 7, 2024, at 9:30 a.m.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Today's meeting adjourned at 10:23 a.m.

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