

MARINE COMMISSION MINUTES
Wednesday, January 18, 2023 – 9:30 a.m.
Council Chambers, City Hall, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Vice Chairman, Keith Drewett; Members: Brian Cunningham, Clinton Lanier, Bill Johnson, and Alternate Member, John Chianis **Also present:** Marina Director, Sean Collins; City Attorney, John Turner and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absence: Robert Snyder

Unexcused Absence: Ben Trautman

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Drewett called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) October 6, 2022

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the October 6, 2022 Marine Commission minutes. Mr. Johnson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Drewett opened public comment. With no one wishing to speak, public comment was closed.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, explained that he will conduct the election of Chairman.

A) Chairman

Mr. Turner opened the floor for nominations for Chairman of the Marine Commission.

Mr. Drewett nominated Mr. Ben Trautman as Chairman. Mr. Cunningham seconded the nomination.

Mr. Turner asked for any other nominations for Chairman.

With no other nominations, Mr. Ben Trautman was unanimously elected as Chairman of the Marine Commission.

B) Vice-Chairman

Mr. Turner opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chairman of the Marine Commission.

Mr. Johnson nominated Mr. Keith Drewett as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Cunningham seconded the nomination.

Mr. Turner asked if there were any other nominations for Vice-Chairman.

With no other nominations being heard, Mr. Keith Drewett was unanimously elected as Vice-Chairman of the Marine Commission.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A) Vessel Enforcement Update and Overboard Discharge – Mr. Keith Drewett

Mr. Drewett said he has been sailing on these waters for many years and this is about as bad of a situation as he can remember with anchored vessels and derelict vessels. He asked if the other Commission members thought that was a fair assessment.

Mr. Cunningham commented that he believes it has to do with the weather more than anything else. He feels that Mr. Drewett and the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County (CWC) have done a great job policing the waters and getting the ball rolling with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC). He agrees that the more you snoop around in the back waters of the river the more derelict vessels you discover.

Mr. Lanier said he would agree with that. He has been sailing these waters for 44 years and it has never been quite this bad as far as the abandoned and derelict vessels are concerned.

Mr. Johnson stated that it is not only here, but in Fort Pierce there is a 30 or 40 foot vessel at the tip of the jetty just sitting there being bashed by the waves coming in.

Mr. Drewett reported that he serves on the CWC Board and he prepared a report that went to City Council, City Manager, City Attorney, and the Marine Commission (on file in the City Clerk's office). He continued by briefly going over the report.

Mr. Cunningham said he is starting to see boats in the basin near his business at the Vero Marine Center. They have had to chase a few out, because they know if they drop anchor they are going to stay right there.

Mr. Drewett continued going through his report and giving an update on the removal of derelict vessels by the County.

B) Update on Anchoring Limitation Areas

Mr. Drewett explained that there is a new regulation from FWC where counties can apply for Anchoring Limitation areas, which is limited to 10-percent of the navigable waters of the county. Vessels are only allowed to anchor in those areas for up to 45 consecutive days. If they go beyond 45 consecutive days then a citation can be issued and if there is no response to the citation the vessel can be removed. As of December 1, 2022 there was a new ruling that the derelict vessel program, which reimburses the county for the cost of removing vessels can

also be applied to these vessels from the anchoring limitation areas. He stated that the City of Vero Beach has applied to Indian River County as part of their application for anchoring limitation areas and the map that was submitted to the County was attached to their agenda.

Mr. Cunningham asked if the area can be expanded or has the permit been applied for already.

Mr. Drewett replied that it is still with the County and it has not been submitted yet.

Mr. Sean Collins, Marina Director, explained that the map they are looking is the area within the City boundaries and the areas marked in red are the typical spots they see boats anchored long term. They do not want to utilize all 10-percent of their navigable area to start with because they need to leave some room to expand if vessels start anchoring in other areas.

Mr. Drewett said he is comfortable with this and it is an excellent beginning. He thinks it covers 99 percent of where he sees vessels anchoring.

Mr. Cunningham commented if this becomes known and people start abiding by it they will find other places to anchor, so that is why he asked if there was room for expansion.

Mr. Drewett explained that there is room in the legislation for the area to be modified, so he thinks this is a good approach and it gives them a little extra room if the situation changes. He said this might be the silver bullet they need, because it is a no fault legislation. They are not required to prove that a vessel is taking on water, it is improperly anchored, or if there is some other violation.

Mr. Turner stated that the City is encouraged with what the County is doing with the limitation areas. He thinks they even asked to expand into some areas near the 17th Street bridge.

Mr. Cunningham said he agrees. West of the channel from Fairlane Harbor is the next area of concern.

Mr. Turner said he believes the Police Chief has been patrolling that area.

Mr. Drewett suggested that the Commission approve this and press for this to be implemented.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the anchoring limitation areas in the City and request that it be implemented by the County as soon as possible. Mr. Johnson seconded motion.

Mr. Drewett opened the floor for public comment on this subject.

Mrs. Linda Moore, City Council Member, asked if they were referring to the sailboat that is outside of Fairlane Harbor. She stated that she knows the owner and he is a resident of Fairlane Harbor. She asked if the boat needs to be moved.

Mr. Cunningham replied no, not at this time.

Mr. Johnson asked if there has been any pushback on this topic at all.

Mr. Drewett stated that the first place to apply for this was Jacksonville and their application was approved fairly quickly. The only requirement on the application is that they hear public comment.

Mr. Collins said the first time they heard about the application with Jacksonville was when FWC posted it with the media for public comment and that was over a year ago.

Mr. Johnson said it is not like people can't briefly come into these areas, they just cannot stay for over 45 days.

Mr. Drewett replied FWC would probably have exceptions for someone making repairs, but for a transient to resupply their boat he believes that once enforcement officers contact the owner using the vessels manufacture number then the 45 day clock starts ticking.

There was no more public comment.

The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Drewett continued by going over the report on the FWC regulations on at risk/public nuisance vessels and overboard pump outs.

C) Update on Riverside Park South Boat Ramp – Mr. Ben Trautman

Mr. Cunningham asked if there is a timeline for the construction of the new docks.

Mr. Turner reported that the design phase was approved by City Council at yesterday's meeting, so it is moving along. The final contract should be issued shortly and the work should start.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A) New Rules from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission on Derelict Vessel Removal – Mr. Keith Drewett

Mr. Drewett stated that he covered the information from FWC earlier in the meeting. He said from an administrative view point he believes they are doing a good job. People are still disappointed and concerned about the lack of law enforcement and their visibility on the water.

B) Marine Commission's Role in the Marina Project – Mr. Keith Drewett

Mr. Drewett commented that the Phase I Marina expansion has attracted a lot more public attention than other Marina issues in the past. He would like to discuss whether the Marine Commission members should have an extended role in marine related matters other than the informal weekly updates they receive from Mr. Collins.

Mr. Cunningham asked what additional input would they have.

Mr. Drewett said he believes they should provide more exposure to the public of what is going on at the Marina. For example, he believes that Mr. Collins is having a terrific year at the Marina and the numbers are pretty good, so he believes it would be helpful to expose that. There were false concerns raised in the past, so hopefully they could push back on that with more formal updates at their meetings from Mr. Collins on the financials, the timeline for the construction, etc.

Mr. Cunningham said the weekly updates they receive do not take long to read, but they provide good information. You can see the patterns and trends of the fuel sales and the transient boats coming and going. He believes that the number of forklift moves will improve as time goes forward. There has been a lot of misinformation out there, so he is not sure if time will correct that or if there is a more formal way of setting the record straight.

Mr. Drewett said he thought maybe they could get more information out there in these more formal settings, which are broadcast so it might be more constructive for the Marina.

Mr. Cunningham mentioned that people who were opposing the Marina expansion were pointing out that the number of boats on racks at the Taylor Creek Marina were way down. What the people did not hear is the rest of the story. Taylor Creek Marina reduced the number of racks in their storage facility and they about tripled their rates and that is why the numbers are down.

Mr. Drewett stated that he checked with Taylor Creek Marina and he was told that there was no room available and it was the same story at the Sebastian Marina Dry Storage building. There is definitely a demand for dry storage in Vero Beach.

Mr. Johnson asked if there are limitations to what Mr. Collins can report to them.

Mr. Collins replied no, he has just been following the templates that were handed down to him when he took over the position. It gives them the basics of weekly revenue, the number of pump outs, and the number of reservations in the moorings and the docks. If there is something special to report on he adds notes to his report. Once they start getting into some hard dates with the project he will let them know and list them on his reports.

Mr. Drewett said he would like to request that Mr. Collins gives strong updates on Phase I of the project at each of their quarterly meetings including the bid process, the financials, etc. The more information they can get out about the process and that it is under control, it is well supervised and well led is helpful to the Marina and the City.

7. MARINA DIRECTOR'S MATTERS

A) 2022 Year in Review

Mr. Collins reported that in 2022 the Marina had 1,632 reservations during the calendar year. 833 were for dockage and 799 were in the moorings. The number of boats docked equated to 17,639 overnights and the average stay per reservation was 21 days. The Moorings equated to 20,531 overnights and 25 days was the average stay per reservation. The total overnight stays for transient vessels using the City Marina in 2022 was 38,170. These people are all helping

their economy and spending money at their stores, restaurants, etc. He stated that the Marina is full and it has been that way for the past couple of years.

Mr. Cunningham asked if he knows how many customers he has to turn away weekly.

Mr. Collins said he would say it is about a dozen a week while in season. That is because they either do not have empty spaces or the vessel is too large to fit in the spaces they have. Some people don't like to moor up to a buoy, so if they cannot dock they move on.

Mr. Drewett mentioned that could be causing part of the increase in vessels anchoring. Some people do not want to moor or don't want to moor up with another vessel and the City does double up vessels in the mooring field. There are plans to expand the mooring field to relieve the pressure on boats anchoring and that will bring in some quick revenue.

Mr. Collins stated that the revenue is already there because they are currently doubling or even tripling up vessels on buoys, but it would definitely take the load off of trying to match up vessels. Right now they have 57 buoys and they might increase that number to 90 or more. Once they get to that part of the project they will redesign the entire mooring field so that they will be able to accommodate vessels of all sizes or at least most of them.

Mr. Drewett asked if he was going to have a price increase in June.

Mr. Collins replied that he was going to do a price increase this past season, but with inflation taking off with no end in sight, he decided to hold off. They might do a rate adjustment later on in 2023.

Mr. Drewett said from his experience, the longer they defer an increase the harder it gets. It is easier to do five (5) percent increases more frequently rather than 20 percent all at once.

B) Update on the Main Marina Docks

Mr. Collins asked to defer this item for now. He said they received information too late and the City Manager has not reviewed it yet. He should have an update at their next meeting.

C) Timeline for the South Complex

Mr. Collins stated that they got past some of the discussions and hurdles over the past year that slowed them down, but they should have the final part of the permit from the consultant for the dry storage building within 60 to 90 days. The permit from the Army Corps of Engineers will take a little longer, so they hope to be able to go out to bid by this summer.

Mr. Cunningham said realistically they might not see any construction start until the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Collins replied that is probably correct.

Mr. Lanier asked if there is a plan for where they will put the boats during the construction.

Mr. Collins stated that will be up to each boat owner, but they will all be notified once they have some hard dates.

Mr. Lanier asked if the current tenants will be able to roll over into the new building.

Mr. Collins replied absolutely. If the customers commit to paying right to the end then they will have a spot.

Mr. Johnson asked where are they percentage wise on the demand compared to past years.

Mr. Collins stated they are pretty consistent with 2021. The Marina got a new computer software program in late 2020, but prior to that they did not have the ability to keep good data.

Mr. Drewett said what grabbed his attention was the fact that they had over 38,000 overnight stays at the Marina. That is a lot of tourists and he is very impressed.

8. CHAIRMAN’S MATTERS

None

9. MEMBER’S MATTERS

None

10. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) April 19, 2023

The next Marine Commission meeting was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, April 19, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. in the City Hall, Council Chambers.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Today’s Marine Commission meeting adjourned at 10:13 a.m.

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