

**VETERANS MEMORIAL ISLAND SANCTUARY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
Wednesday, April 7, 2021 – 9:30 a.m.  
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

**PRESENT:** Chairman, John Michael Matthews; Vice Chairman, Joel Herman; Members: Barbara Fallon, Curtis Paulisin, and Alternate Member, Peggy Lyon **Also Present:** Assistant City Attorney Jenny Flanigan; Assistant Public Work’s Director, Richard Mutterback; Recreation Director, Jim O’Connell; and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Hawkins

**Excused Absences:** Don Wickstrand and Sylvester McIntosh

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman 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) March 3, 2021**

**Ms. Fallon made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 3, 2021 Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee meeting. Mr. Herman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**5. NEW BUSINESS**

**A) Request for use of the Island – Mrs. Michelle Dale, American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County, Inc.**

Mrs. Michelle Dale, President of American Gold Star Mothers of Indian River County, Inc., said that she submitted a request to use Veterans Memorial Island on November 7, 2021. They are planning their third annual walk-a-thon for military Veteran suicide awareness. The event will be at Riverside Park this year and they would like to be able to take the participants of the walk-a-thon through Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. The Island honors the Veterans and the walk-a-thon is honoring those Veterans who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The people in attendance could be some of those Veterans and their families and others are just loyal supporters of Veterans who are fighting the battle within. On November 7, 2021, the registration will take place in Riverside Park, but their 2.2 mile walk will pass through Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary starting at approximately 9:00 a.m. She explained that they will be utilizing the Island for about an hour and they will be conducting their closing ceremony and a wellness fair afterwards at Riverside Park.

Mr. Paulisin stated that what the Gold Star Mothers are doing in this community is great and they stand behind them 100 percent.

Mr. Matthews announced that Mrs. Dale will also be the Keynote Speaker at the Memorial Day Service.

**Mrs. Lyon made a motion to approve the use of the Island by the Gold Star Mothers for part of their walk. Ms. Fallon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**B) Update on the Words From War Monument – Mr. Bruce Cady, Next Generation Veterans**

Mr. Bruce Cady, President of Next Generation Veterans, Inc., said it is his privilege to give them an update on the Words From War sculpture monument near the entrance to Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. He explained that four (4) years ago the Next Generation Veterans started a project to create a monument for those who served from 1990 to the present, or are still serving in conflicts today. They partnered with Mr. Ross Powers, a local artist who builds large sculptures. Mr. Powers interviewed many combat Veterans from the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars and conflicts and from those interviews he created the concept of the Words From War monumental sculpture. The sculpture consists of three (3) concrete T-Walls, which are what the military uses for protection in combat areas. On the T-Walls are words that he took from the interviews and they will touch veterans from all conflicts. Above the walls is a dome that represents a helmet, which protects the military personnel during conflicts. The Next Generation Veterans would like to thank the City for all their support and all they have done. The City created a sidewalk from the parking lot to the monument and they fixed the drainage issue for that area. They would also like to thank Bill Bryant Construction for getting them through the engineering process of building such a large monument. He explained that they have to wait 21 days for the concrete to cure before they can go onto the next step. The concrete slab has rebar coming up out of it, which will become internal supports for the walls. Each wall weighs roughly 12,000 pounds, but the artist and the engineers found a way to build the forms at the location so that the concrete can be poured on site. They have to wait another 21 days before they can remove the forms and install the dome on top. They are anticipating on having a formal unveiling in late June. The walls should be completed in time for Memorial Day, but the dome will not be in place. They would like to invite the community to stop by on Memorial Day. Members of the Next Generation Veterans organization will be there to talk about the project and what they do to support the Veterans of Indian River County.

Mr. Matthews asked if there are any other monuments in this area for the Next Generation Veterans conflicts.

Mr. Cady replied that there is a small tribute in Port St. Lucie, but nothing of this size and magnitude. This will most likely be a regional monument for the current conflicts.

Mr. Matthews thanked Mr. Cady for the update.

Mr. Cady said if it is appropriate, he would like to come back to their June meeting so he can share the date of the dedication for the Words From War monument.

**C) Request for use of the Island for Memorial Day Ceremony – May 31, 2021**

Mr. Matthews said they received a request to use the Island for the Memorial Day Service and they each received a draft copy of the Memorial Day program (on file in the City Clerk's office). He announced who will be in attendance and the events that will take place on Memorial Day. He said this year they will be reading the poem "In Flanders' Fields" to pay tribute to the fallen. It will be included as an insert with the program and on the back side is the picture of when they brought 40,000 bodies back from Europe to the United States. They will be tying the Memorial Day Ceremony in with 100 years ago when World War I (WWI) was taking place and there was also a pandemic going at that time.

Mrs. Lyon read the poem "In Flanders' Fields" from the insert of the Memorial Day program.

Mr. Matthews stated that worldwide there were 40 million casualties in WWI, so it had a huge effect. Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary exists because of a hero who came back from WWI.

**Mr. Herman made motion to accept the application from the Veterans Council to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for the Memorial Day Service. Ms. Fallon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

Mr. Matthews announced that they received one (1) more request to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for a memorial service on June 20, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The memorial service for an honorably discharged Air Force Veteran, Mr. Fred Scheyhing and the paperwork looks to be in order. The request is from Mrs. Nancy Scheyhing and they are expecting approximately 21 people to attend.

**Ms. Fallon made a motion to accept the application request to use the Island for the memorial service. Mr. Herman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

## **6. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Matthews mentioned that they already approved the request from the Indian River County Victims' Rights Coalition to use the Island for a memorial service for all those who have been victims of violence. That service will be held on April 22, 2021 at 6 p.m.

### **A) Update on the World War I Monument and Donations**

Mr. Matthews explained that Mr. Alex MacWilliam, Sr. had the vision of creating Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. He was a hero of World War I (WWI) who received the Iron Cross and the Purple Heart medals and then came back to serve the community and the Country in many ways. He said they have had several ideas of monuments in different shapes and sizes. One (1) that was recently mentioned was The Doughboy statue, which is a classic look of a WWI soldier. He explained that there is a mold already made of The Doughboy statue and it costs about \$20,000 to have the bronze statue made. If they decided to go with that idea it would still need to be funded and taken to the City Council for approval. There are some people who are interested in financing the project, so there would not be any cost to the City. This is the only place the Commission members can discuss this because of the Sunshine Law, so that is why he is sharing this idea. The soldier statue would kind of represent Mr. Alex MacWilliam Sr. looking out over the island.

Ms. Fallon asked how tall would the statue be.

Mr. Mike Di Scipio, Military Officers Association (MOA), replied that he believes it would be life size, somewhere between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet tall and it would be on a pedestal, which would be 4 feet in height.

Ms. Fallon asked if the statue would be the WWI monument.

Mr. Di Scipio said that there are two (2) options. One (1) is with the statue on a granite base with plaques or engravings on the sides of the pedestal. The other option is to not have the statue and have a monument with some of the other ideas including the first verse of the poem "In Flanders Fields". They want to develop one (1) of those concepts before they engage a designer.

Mr. Paulisin asked if anyone has reached out to the MacWilliam family.

Mr. Di Scipio replied no, he has not. He is not sure if anyone else has yet.

Ms. Fallon said she agrees that they need to do that.

Mr. Matthews stated that he would reach out to them. It would not be a memorial just to Mr. Alex MacWilliam Sr., but to all WWI Veterans. The MacWilliam family should be asked if they would be comfortable with the idea on honoring his conflict. The MacWilliam family should also be invited to the dedication.

Ms. Fallon stated that the height of the statue might cause some complications due to the fact that the Commission would not allow the Words From War monument to go on the Island because it was too tall.

Mr. Paulisin replied that there were many reasons why the Words From War monument could not go on the Island.

Mr. Matthews stated that is a good point, but it would be about half the height as the Words From War monument. The main reason was the weight of the cement for the monument, because the Island is nothing more than mangroves with sand over the top. The Commission did approve a memorial on the Island for the Next Generation Veterans, but a design has not been created yet.

Mr. Di Scipio asked if they need an application from MOA, or is there any paperwork that they need to submit.

Mr. Matthews replied no. This is just in the planning stage and no dedication date has been set yet, so there is no reason to request the use of the Island.

Mr. Di Scipio asked if there is a height restriction on the Island.

Mr. Matthews replied no, but they are just an Advisory Committee and the City Council would have the final approval of any monuments.

Mrs. Lyon suggested that they let the group (MOA) flush the detail out for all the different options and then bring them to the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee to look at and make a decision based on that presentation.

Mr. Matthews stated that he believes they all agree that there should be some type of monument on the Island for WWI and they are still on target to pursue that idea.

Mrs. Dale said in regards to The Doughboy monument, she believes it would arouse attention in the community especially the younger generation. It will invite them to ask questions about the military and to understand the sacrifices, which they all made. She thinks a monument like that would be a wonderful idea.

Mr. Paulisin stated that whoever has the lead on this project needs to speak with the community to find out what they want and keep bringing their ideas to the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee, because it is a work in progress.

Mr. Matthews stated that the MOA has taken the charge of leading the project, because it means a lot to several military organizations.

Mr. Paulisin said if it is going to be a community monument then they need to reach out to the people for input, but he does not think it is up to the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee to do that.

Mr. Matthews stated that they have asked MOA to keep them posted on their progress and they have also been speaking with the Veterans Council.

#### **B) Replacing or Building a Stage for Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary**

Mr. Matthews explained that the old stage they used has been scrapped because it was not repairable. The Veterans Council is the organization that usually uses the stage, so they need to be involved if there is fundraising to be done for a new stage. He is not sure what to do for Memorial Day other than have a podium up on a riser for the speakers and have chairs placed on the ground on both sides. He said they discussed possibly building a permanent stage or purchasing another one (1) that the City could also use at other events.

Mrs. Lyon said she believes they were told that there was another stage that could go on the Island for Memorial Day.

Mr. Jim O'Connell, Recreation Director, sated they have another stage that is larger than the old one, but it is not covered. He is pretty sure that they can have it on the Island for Memorial Day. He would not call it a permanent solution, but he encourages them to keep discussing other options. He suggested that they might want to think about a permanent stage that would fit in architecturally with the Island, because they do not want to be out on an open stage without a cover. He thinks a permanent stage could be a good feature of the Island. He will check with his staff to make sure the stage is available for them to use on Memorial Day.

Mrs. Lyon asked if there is a way to start pursuing their options and costs of permanent stages.

Mr. O'Connell said he has done quite a bit of research on portable stages, but not on anything permanent. He can start asking around and get some ideas from the Public Works department.

Mr. Richard Mutterback, Assistant Public Work's Director, explained that he got with the Grounds Maintenance Manager and they took some measurements and he is not sure if any of the portable

stages they have are an option. They will look at it again and have some better answers for them at their next meeting. He asked if they had thought about stage rentals since they are only using it for two (2) events per year.

Mr. Matthews replied that it would be the Veterans Council using the stage. He will be at the Veterans Council meeting today and he will bring that idea up as a possible option.

Mr. Mutterback explained that they would like to do a cost comparison on renting versus constructing a stage. A project like this would require the use of engineering consultants and designers.

Mr. Matthews said he does not believe any other organizations have a use for a stage except for the Veterans Council.

Mr. Herman said his only concern is that if the rental stage is broken, previously engaged, etc., it would leave them trying to make other arrangements. In the short term it might be a good fix, but for the long term they need something else.

## **7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS**

Mr. Matthews said just for fun, he provided a photograph of what Veterans Memorial Island looked like 100 years ago and a copy of what the programs looked like back then (on file in the City Clerk's office). He also handed out a photograph from the Vietnam Veterans War Day showing the dedication of a wreath in the design of the Vietnam Service Ribbon (on file in the City Clerk's office). He announced that the Vietnam Veterans reunion will be taking place at Wickham Park in Melbourne, Florida from April 15 to 18, 2021. It is the largest Veterans Reunion in the United States.

## **8. MEMBER'S MATTERS**

Mr. Paulisin reported that yesterday he spoke with City Council about the Veterans Golf Tournament. The golf tournament is starting to sell out and all of the proceeds go to helping the homeless Veterans in Indian River County.

Mr. Herman announced that he is retiring from the Veterans Service Office on May 28, 2021, so he will be resigning from his position on the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee. It was proposed to City Council to turn the position over to his assistant, Mr. John Birhanzl. He will bring him to their next meeting and introduce him to the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee.

Ms. Jenny Flanigan, Assistant City Attorney, said that the Sunshine Law was mentioned a couple of times today and it is good that they understand it. She encourages the Committee members to individually speak freely with the public and bring back their comments to their meetings. If they have any question they are welcome to contact the City Attorney's office.

## **9. NEXT MEETING DATE**

**A) May 5, 2021**

The next meeting of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is scheduled for May 5, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

**10. ADJOURNMENT**

Today's meeting adjourned at 10:33 a.m.

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