

MARINE COMMISSION MINUTES
Monday, July 25, 2022 – 9:30 a.m.
Council Chambers, City Hall, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Chairman, Ben Trautman; Vice Chairman, Keith Drewett; Members: Bill Johnson, and Alternate member John Chianis; City Attorney, John Turner; and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absences: Clinton Lanier, Robert Snyder and Brian Cunningham

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Trautman called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) April 11, 2022

Mr. Drewett made a motion to approve the April 11, 2022 Marine Commission minutes. Mr. Johnson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Chris Woodruff, owner of Vero Tackle and Marina, said he would like to thank the Marine Commission for discussing some of the issues he encounters. He owns the 30 slip Marina behind Riverside Café and he is noticing more boats anchoring there, which is becoming a nuisance. There are many boats dragging anchor and they are worried about transients and homeless people living these boats. This will get out of control, so they have the chance now to stop it early rather than trying to fix it after the fact. He said they don't have much police presence in the area. The Florida Fish and Wild Life Commission (FWC) likes the inlets and the Sheriff's boat starts out under the bridge, but they also head to the inlets. The Coast Guard comes through more often than any other agency and if they are in the area they will stop vessels. He said he is on the water several hours every day and he sees violations all the time. There is a no-wake zone north of the Barber Bridge and he has witnessed the Coast Guard getting stuck there for about an hour at a time pulling over boats. He would really like to see the City Police boat out there, so maybe they could make a recommendation to City Council about getting more hours out on the water. He stated that he is qualified to teach the Police Officers how to maneuver up to a boat, tie up, and how to keep their boat where they want it. He would like to volunteer his time and extra boats to check on vessels that are not anchored in the correct areas and report where they are.

Mr. Trautman stated that they will discuss some of these topics today and the police presence is a good subject. He does not know the status of the police boat and the staffing issues, but hopefully they will see more of it soon. It is interesting to hear about the no wake zones, because their Commission worked on getting those signs back in place.

Mr. Woodruff said the sign heading north of the Barber Bridge is not that good, but going north to south there are two (2) great signs that people cannot miss. There might also be a lot of new people here that don't know about the strict laws of navigable waterways.

Mr. Sean Collins, Marina Director, said an officer's presence is a good thing, whether they stop people to educate them or write a citation. He recommended that if anyone sees violators to call the Police Department. Hopefully the calls to the Police Department will be tracked and worked into their budget to increase their hours on the water.

Mr. Drewett stated that a couple of years ago City Council requested 20 hours per week of boat patrol, but then COVID hit. They have a boat now, so he would like to know where they stand. To have the boat out there for 20 hours a week would be massive.

4. OLD BUSINESS

A) Vessel Enforcement Update – Mr. Keith Drewett

Mr. Drewett reported he is aware of 14 vessels in the City that are at risk of being derelict, unattended, or abandoned. He said the Coast Guard has a list of criteria for determining if a vessel is derelict, but only one (1) of these vessels fits their requirements and that boat is located north of Fritz Island. It is time to address it, because it has been there about three (3) years. There are two (2) in the cove north of the bridge to Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary, six (6) vessels are near Riverside Café and Mr. Woodruff's business, three (3) are in the cove near Fritz Island, and three (3) are in the mangroves. He announced that there is a new tool coming from the FWC, which is a voluntary program to remove at-risk vessels before they become derelict. How this works is that it gives a boat owner the option of allowing the State to take possession of the vessel to sell or destroy, which allows the owner to walk away from it. It would be funded by the FWC, so they need to figure out how to use this tool.

Mr. Turner reported that he attended a meeting on July 11, 2022 with the County Commissioners and a FWC representative who advised them of the new "At-risk Rule" and it applies to a vessel that is not under power. A boat has to be under power at all times, so if they come across a vessel that is having engine problems or if it is determined that it is not under power they will issue a citation. If anyone receives three (3) citations within a certain amount of time, the boat can then be towed. This is a valuable tool that FWC will have going forward. He reported that the County is proceeding with designating the anchoring limitation areas and he will bring it to the Commission for them to review when it is done.

Mr. Trautman asked what qualifies a vessel as being at-risk.

Mr. Turner explained that under the FWC's rules every vessel has to be under power. If a vessel is not under power or does not have that capability, then it is considered at-risk and a citation can be issued.

Mr. Trautman asked what is considered under power.

Mr. Collins replied that the FWC Office referenced propulsion tests on motors or if a sailboat is able to move a certain distance. They would allow them a certain amount of time to correct

an issue, but if it is not corrected it would escalate to their next level of enforcement. This is largely geared toward vessels that are anchored all the time and no one is checking on them for weeks or months at a time. Those are the vessels that become at-risk of becoming derelict, so this new rule will give them an option of addressing those vessels.

Mr. Trautman asked where will the boats be towed to.

Mr. Drewett replied that they will be taken to a Marina.

Mr. Trautman asked for an update on the letter they intended to hand out to anchoring vessels.

Mr. Collins stated that they have a stack of them at the Marina and that is the extent of it. They are not going out and attaching them to any of the boats at this time.

Mr. Drewett asked if an official of the City would have to place the letters on the vessels, or can it be done by a citizen.

Mr. Turner replied that it should be handled by a City official.

Mr. Collins said that people have been inquiring, because they have heard about the anchoring rule changes.

Mr. Trautman said the at-risk rule sounds great on paper, but his concern is that there might not be enough resources to make it all happen.

Mr. Drewett commented that if they can get all of these boats cleared out in a concentrated effort, the word will get out in the community and it will become a preventative measure.

Mr. Johnson stated that vessels have not anchored near Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for a long time, but now one (1) or two (2) have shown up and others have started anchoring there. They created a problem by allowing boats to anchor there and the longer they allow it to continue the worse it will get.

Mr. Trautman asked what can the Marine Commission recommend to City Council.

Mr. Collins responded that he feels they have done what they can, now it is up to law enforcement. They will have to wait for the County to establish the anchoring limitation zones in order to start enforcing it.

Mr. Drewett explained that the anchoring limitation time frame is 45 days. He asked if it would be feasible to begin documenting these boats, so if or when it becomes law they can start enforcing it right away.

Mr. Turner replied that there are a lot of questions and situations they are discussing. They will work on how to address the loop holes.

Mr. Johnson asked who is their liaison with trying to make their requests happen, or do they rely on law enforcement to take care of it all.

Mr. Turner said it is difficult, but enforcement is getting better. He stated that the City has a new patrol boat, the State is taking a more active role, and they are getting more rules on the books to help them. They need to figure out how to enforce and deal with the small percentage of boats in the area that are the issue. If people see or witness events that they are concerned about they should contact the Vero Beach Police Department.

Mr. Trautman stated that this is still a process that is in motion, so he believes they need to give it more time before they make any recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Collins explained that the word will get out and spread quickly that Indian River County is actively setting anchoring limitation zones, so people might start leaving on their own rather than dealing with it.

B) Anchoring Limitation Areas – Mr. Keith Drewett

This item was discussed with item 4-A).

5. NEW BUSINESS

None

6. MARINA DIRECTOR'S MATTERS

Mr. Collins reported that City Council did not choose the largest dry storage building, but they agreed on the next size down. The application and site plans have been submitted to the Planning Department for their review and approval and then it will be presented to the Planning and Zoning Board for their input and recommendations. He said by this fall, the plans should be presented to City Council for their approval to move forward.

Mr. Turner reported that after it goes through the approval process then they can get their development order in place. The estimated time for that is the middle to end of October. After that, they will find a contractor and get the construction started. They are probably looking at it being completed in 2024.

Mr. Chianis asked during the construction phase will the boats that are in the existing facility need to be relocated.

Mr. Collins replied yes. The City does not have another place to store them, so it will be up to the owners to find an alternate location.

Mr. Trautman asked how are the renovations going on the established Marina.

Mr. Collins replied that they are finalizing the sketches with the consultant and wrapping it up, so they can be submitted to the proper agencies.

Mr. Trautman said he noticed in the weekly reports that there is still a full-time position open at the Marina and it has been open for a long time.

Mr. Johnson mentioned that he looked at the job description and it is rather extensive. It could be daunting for someone looking at it and the hourly wage seems low.

Mr. Collins replied that they have had a hard time getting applicants. They have one (1) individual going through the hiring process, so hopefully it will be filled soon. He said he agrees that the salary is more on the low side compared to other Marinas he has worked for, but that wage is set by the Teamsters Union.

Mr. Turner stated that this is more of a staffing issue and it is being addressed by the City Manager.

Mr. Trautman asked if the Marine Commission could make a recommendation to City Council to consider adjusting the salary.

Mr. Turner reminded them that they are an Advisory Commission and they give advice to City Council on issues that City Council assigns to them. Their advice right now should pertain to the anchoring limitation zones, enforcement, derelict vessels, the expansion of the Marina, and the improvement of docking facilities. The personnel issues are handled by the City Manager. He will bring their concerns to the City Manager and then report back to the Commission.

7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

A) Comments from City Council at May 17, 2022 Meeting

Mr. Trautman reported that when he addressed City Council at their May 17, 2022 meeting they expressed their appreciation of the Marine Commission, their knowledge, the dedication and interest in the Marina, and the wealth the Marina brings to the City.

8. MEMBER'S MATTERS

None

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) Set the Date for the Next Marine Commission Meeting

The next Marine Commission meeting was tentatively scheduled for Thursday, October 6, 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The Marine Commission adjourned today's meeting at 10:16 a.m.

/rc