

**SPECIAL CALL MARINE COMMISSION MINUTES
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2023 9:30 A.M.
CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VERO BEACH, FLORIDA**

PRESENT: Chairman, Keith Drewett; Members: Brian Cunningham, Bill Johnson, Robert Snyder, and Alternate Member, Justin Beard **Also present:** Marina Director, Sean Collins; City Attorney, John Turner and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absences: Clinton Lanier and John Chianis

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Drewett called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and the Senior Administrative Assistant called the roll.

2. ITEM FOR DISCUSSION:

A) Recommendation to the City Council on the Marina Rate Resolution

Mr. Drewett explained that this meeting arose as the result of the last City Council meeting. Marina rates were presented to City Council, but after some discussion it was recommended that the Marine Commission review the rates and provide their opinion to City Council.

Mr. Sean Collins, Marina Director, said he provided them with a rate comparison with other surrounding Marina's (copy attached to the original minutes). He said he compared the City's rates with Vero Beach Yacht Club, Loggerhead, Vero Marine Center, Vero Tackle & Marina, and Quail Valley, which are the City's main competitors. Further to the south and north are the Fort Pierce City Marina, Harbor Town, Sebastian Inlet, Castaway Cove, and Pelican Yacht Club. They can see that the Vero Beach Marina's rates are in line and comparable with the others.

Mr. Drewett said he handed out a copy of a spreadsheet he created showing comparisons and an analysis of the current rates and the proposed rates with what he considers the three (3) major competitors with the City Marina (copy attached to the original minutes).

Mr. Cunningham said his only comment on the comparatives is on the dock fees because the fees will always tend to be higher around an inlet. For the Vero Marine Center, he looks more at the annual rate instead of the transient rate because the Vero Marine Center is not geared for transient dockage. He looks at the annual rate and what amenities they offer, such as floating docks, the proximity to the inlet, etc. People can expect to pay more when they are closer to an inlet so this is not a true apples-to-apples comparison across the board.

Mr. Drewett said each Marina has different attributes. The Vero Beach City Marina has stores, restaurants, and a dog park within walking distance as well as a shuttle service, but Fort Pierce does not have those conveniences. He explained that Harbor Town is a gated community so

people staying there will need to have a car or utilize taxis. He believes that the Vero Beach Marina has a lot going for it. He said this is a good analysis, but he is not sure if they are being aggressive enough in their pricing because it has been three (3) years since they had price increases. He said they all know that there are some docks in disrepair, and they have a large Marina development underway. It will cost about seven (7) million for phase I and they have to pay for that. He is concerned that if they go another three (3) or four (4) years without a price increase it will be substantial when they do. He feels they should ease into it more aggressively.

Mr. Collins explained that when working with their consultant they showed that the figures for dockage are in line to pay for phase I. He said as they move along in the process, they will adjust accordingly. They know their customers and where they travel to and from so that is what they base the rates on. He explained that if they up the rates too high they risk losing the rental of empty slips and that adds up. He would rather have it full 100 percent of the time at a lower rate and win in the long run.

Mr. Drewett asked if they were leaving the dry storage rates alone since they are so close to construction.

Mr. Collins replied yes.

Mr. Drewett asked if there were any thoughts on how high they could go on the rates for the floating docks.

Mr. Collins replied that there will be incremental increases for them as well as for the new South Complex when it comes online. He said the prices for the main docks will slowly creep up and as they move along they will be at good comparable rates to maximize the revenue potential of the Marina.

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, said there has been some discussion of recommending that the rates be tied to an annual increase on the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Mr. Drewett said in his experience, he has always been in favor of small increases on an annual basis rather than a big increase.

Mr. Turner explained that if they set it now based on some kind of standard they do not have to address the rates every year or every other year.

Mr. Collins stated that in his experience in the Marina business, he would stay away from that. A lot of things change when people buy and sell boats. It is a privilege to have a boat and people have different financial abilities. He said something could happen in the political realm across the country that could affect boat ownership laws and the next thing you know people are selling their boats. If they have an automatic price increase at that same time it could be

problematic. If this is something the Marine Commission wants to recommend, he would suggest that they talk with the Finance Director.

Mr. Drewett said he is in favor of staying with an annual market base review with a Marine Commission discussion. He has to stay with the Marina Director's recommendation on having a discussion like they are having now.

Mr. Johnson said he would like to suggest that the Marine Commission discuss the rates on a yearly basis at one of their regular meetings instead of holding a Special Call meeting. He mentioned that he has reached out to many travelers who go up and down the east coast and they unanimously believe that Vero Beach is a lot cheaper than more places they stay. Our prices might be competitive locally, but not necessarily to the transient crowd.

Mr. Collins stated that rate structures vary from place to place, but they have to keep them competitive locally. They do the same thing when the fuel prices change, they check out the prices in the area.

Mr. Johnson asked what time of year would be best to review the rates as a Commission.

Mr. Collins replied that summertime would be best as the City's fiscal year starts October 1st.

Mr. Drewett asked if they could plan on reviewing the rates at their regular meeting in June each year.

Mr. Collins said that would be fine.

Mr. Drewett asked what is the policy on live aboard vessels or does the Marina discourage them.

Mr. Collins stated that he has seen the number of live aboards go down with the advancement of technology. If people are still working they need to be connected to the internet and cable television. They have a few retirees who live on their boats, but they have not seen an influx of new people living aboard.

Mr. Drewett asked if there was a limit to the number of live aboard vessels they would allow or if there were any fines or restrictions.

Mr. Collins replied that right now there is no limit.

Mr. Cunningham asked how many live aboards does the Marina have now.

Mr. Collins responded that they have six (6) or eight (8).

Mr. Drewett asked if there is a consensus of the Marine Commission that they would like to review the Marina rates on an annual basis.

Mr. Johnson made a motion that the Marine Commission review the Marina rates in June on an annual basis for the October 1st fiscal year. Mr. Drewett seconded the motion.

Mr. Drewett opened the meeting for public comment. With no one wishing to speak, he closed public comment.

The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Drewett made a motion they recommend to City Council that the Marina rates be adopted as proposed.

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

The motion passed 5-0 on a roll call vote with Mr. Beard voting yes, Mr. Snyder yes, Mr. Johnson yes, Mr. Cunningham yes, and Mr. Drewett yes.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

4. ADJOURNMENT

Today's Special Call Marine Commission meeting adjourned at 9:47 a.m.

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