

**VETERANS MEMORIAL ISLAND SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, November 1, 2023 – 9:30 a.m.
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

PRESENT: Chairman, John Matthews Members: Curtis Paulisin, and Melissa Arndt **Also Present:** Assistant Public Works Director, Joseph Berenato; Assistant City Engineer, Danessa Chambers; Civil Engineer, Austin Linville; City Attorney, John Turner and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absences: Michelle Dale and Carolyn Lange

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) September 6, 2023

Mr. Matthews said that under item 6-B), the minutes reflect that the Loudermilk family lost two (2) sons in World War II (WWII) but one (1) was actually killed in the Vietnam War.

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

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Tony Young stated that there were five (5) men from the local area who were lost in action in the month of November. He said on November 9th, Willy Williams lost his life in Italy by a mortar attack. James Donevant was another soldier killed in Europe and did not make it back. In the Pacific, George Button was a soldier whose life was taken on the island of Tuvalu. The fourth individual is Robert Rabeck who was fighting in the same area as James Donevant. The last man was an Army Air Force individual, Luther Edward Groves. He was flying his bomber in the North Atlantic and there was no record of his entire flight.

Mr. Young said at their last meeting, Mrs. Lange shared some information about a Bible she had in her possession and wanted to find the family so it could be returned to them. He reported that he did some research and found out that Navy Captain Jack C. Norris was the second Medical Officer on the U.S.S. Bountiful. He read the inscription in the front of the Bible, which was signed by Jack C. Norris. He was able to find out who Jack Norris was because he also compiled and edited a book on the accounts of the U.S.S. Bountiful. The book was donated to the Naval Historical Society and on the back of the book was the stamp from Jack C. Norris's medical office in Atlanta, Georgia, so he

was able to track him back to Atlanta. On the inside of the Bible is a note stating that Jack Norris left the Bible to his grandson James M. Sibley, Jr., who was a friend of Mrs. Lang's brother while serving in the Navy.

Mr. Matthews thanked Mr. Young for helping them to carry on the memories of all those who are recognized on the Island. He said if Mr. Young did not do all of this he is not sure who would have the time or ability to provide this history.

Mr. Young announced that there is a good likelihood that one (1) of the men who were lost in the Pacific and died in a Japanese POW camp might be coming back home to be interred in the Winter Beach Cemetery. The Hurst family will make the decision but for now, his remains are in Hawaii.

5. NEW BUSINESS

A) Request for use of the Island - Wreaths Across America Ceremony, December 16, 2023 - Mr. Rick Lewis

Mr. Matthews stated that they received an application to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for the Wreaths Across America ceremony on December 16, 2023. He said this great event takes place at many locations in the County and they are hoping to do it again on Veterans Memorial Island.

Mr. Rick Lewis, Wreaths Across America, said that they place wreaths in every cemetery in Indian River County except for Brookside Historical Cemetery in Fellsmere. He is here today to find out if they will be able to access the Island. If they can use the Island the ceremony will be exactly like the past few years and they will need electricity and a small stage. He explained that they will start by laying the wreaths at Crestlawn Cemetery at 10:00 a.m. and then they will go to Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary to lay wreaths there and hold a short 30-minute ceremony.

Mr. Matthews asked what are their plans if they cannot use the Island.

Mr. Lewis replied that they plan on placing a couple of wreaths at the Words From War monument and if they are allowed, they would like to attach the ceremonial wreaths to the fence that barricades the entrance to the Island. The wreaths will remain there until after the New Year and then they will come back and remove them.

Mr. Matthews made a motion to approve the application to use Veterans Memorial Island for the Wreaths Across America ceremony. Ms. Arndt seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Lewis said if the bridge is not done they will make an announcement that the ceremony will not be taking place on the Island in Vero Beach this year and they will invite everyone to attend the ceremony in Sebastian.

Mr. Paulisin asked what is their website if people want to learn more about this event.

Mr. Lewis explained that they can go to their website or find them on Facebook at Wreathes Across America Indian River County.

Mr. Paulisin asked how much does a wreath cost.

Mr. Lewis replied that they are \$17.00 this year. People can purchase them online at Wreaths Across America Indian River County and they will find the links to the various locations.

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, asked Mr. Lewis if he could provide an update to City Council.

Mr. Lewis replied yes, he can do that.

Mr. Matthews stated that this program is nationwide and not just a local event.

Mr. Lewis stated that wreaths are also placed at the Normandy Cemetery and in Europe.

B) National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day – December 7, 2023

Mr. Matthews said that Colonel Carlos Holcomb is planning a ceremony for Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day on December 7, 2023. The Island will not be available so it will be held at the Grand Pavilion in Riverside Park. When there was an American Veterans (AMVETS) organization here many years ago their main thing was to remember Pearl Harbor Day.

6. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Matthews stated that Mrs. Michelle Dale Chairs the committee for the Walk-A-Thon for Veteran suicide awareness, which honors the memory of those we have lost and helps bring awareness to Veteran suicide. She is not here today to discuss the details but the walk is 2.2 miles, which represents the 22 Veterans who commit suicide every day. The walk starts at the Grand Pavilion in Riverside Park, but it will not be passing through Veterans Memorial Island this year. Every year hundreds of people come out to support this event.

Mr. Paulisin said this event gets bigger every year which is great because Veteran suicide is a problem nationwide. It is a very nice function but it is sorrowing to hear how many military Veterans take their lives due to their mental condition that many keep hidden.

Mr. Matthews said anyone who wants to participate or donate to this cause can do that online at www.ircgoldstarmoms.org.

A) Veterans Day Ceremony – November 11, 2023

Mr. Matthews said the Veterans Day ceremony is on November 11, 2023, and the programs have been printed. He gave a brief account of the events and the individuals involved in the ceremony. This year the ceremony will be held at the Grand Pavilion in Riverside Park.

Mr. Matthews announced that the Marine Corps Birthday Ball is also on November 11, 2023. They are expecting over 200 people to attend this event, which will be at Oak Harbor starting at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are still available at John Michael Matthews Fine Jewelry store on Beachland Boulevard.

B) Update on the Stage and World War II Tribute

Mr. Young said that the amount of work to create the World War II (WWII) tribute is a continual effort by many people and they just reached a significant point. They spent about a year and a half getting all the plans approved by the City and now they have been provided to the construction

company. He reported that Bill Bryant & Associates met with their Committee yesterday and informed them that the final estimated cost for the project is now \$700,000. They have raised about \$300,000 in cash and in-kind services so they will be reaching out to the public for assistance in reaching their goal. This is a Veteran centered community and he hopes they will support it. He said they are very fortunate to have Bill Bryant & Associates working with them because they know all the subcontractors. The City has been very helpful by reaching out to foundries to get proposals to make the medals and logos. He explained that the medals would be molded to look like the other service markers and medallions on the Island. The contractor doing the black granite work also did the POW/MIA monument and the Public Works Department assisted them in obtaining the cost for 10 trees. He stated that the sailcloth and the supporting structure costs will be a concern, so they might have to complete the project in phases. On November 7th he will be at the County Commission meeting asking for assistance with the cost of the foundation. The Historical Society has funded videos that will be part of the tribute. He said there are eight (8) families from the community who lost loved ones in WWII that have cenotaph markers on the Island and their stories will be included in the videos. He thanked the Historical Society, especially Mrs. Ruth Stanbridge, Historian, and Mr. Nick Verola, Videographer, for doing this at no cost. He reported that the 21st Amendment Distillery, owned by Mr. Jeff Palleschi, ex-Marine, donated a barrel of bourbon at cost. It has been released and people can purchase a bottle of the limited edition bourbon at the distillery and the proceeds will go to the WWII tribute. He said if anyone wants to help with the WWII Tribute they can go to the Cultural Council of Indian River County website where they can watch a video about the project and make a donation.

Mr. Paulisin said that the northern residents are returning now, so he would like to know if there are any fundraisers in the near future so they can contribute and support this project.

Mr. Young said they will continue to solicit help on social media, with local organizations, and in the community. The next opportunity for a specific gathering will be on January 20th at the Heritage Center and the Historical Society will have a video night on November 14th for the public to attend and people can make donations then as well.

Mr. Paulisin stated that he puts together a big golf tournament in the community every year, so he will talk with the Board and see if they could donate half of the proceeds from this year's tournament. He said that might be a significant donation.

Mr. Matthews stated that the stage and WWII tribute will be donated back to the City once it is complete.

C) Update on the Bridge Replacement

Mrs. Danessa Chambers, Assistant City Engineer, reported that they were on site yesterday when they poured the bridge deck and it seemed to go very smoothly. The remaining major structural items include the construction of the approach slab, the barrier walls, and the light poles. The contractor is still looking at December 6, 2023, as the substantial completion date but she is not sure if it will be cleared for vehicular traffic. She stated that once the bridge is complete there are still several engineering components that have to be done to get it cleared for vehicular loading. She will receive an update later today and provide that information to the City Clerk's office so it can be distributed to the Veterans Memorial Island Committee. She said the contractor is doing an excellent job.

Mr. Joseph Berenato, Assistant Public Works Director, reported that they have constructed a form for the base of the Alex MacWilliam monument and once they can get onto the Island it will be poured. He said it will be placed on the concrete so there will not be any disturbance of the area.

Mr. Matthews said they previously discussed that when it sits that far back it gets overgrown with vegetation. He suggested that since they are building a new one (1) maybe it should be moved forward.

Mr. Berenato said he would pass that suggestion on. He also reported that the cenotaph marker for Bakari Mosley is finished and it will be installed once they can get back onto the Island.

7. CHAIRMAN’S MATTERS

None

8. MEMBER’S MATTERS

Mr. Paulisin stated that Winn-Dixie is a great sponsor and they give a lot to Veteran causes. He said Aldi bought out Winn-Dixie, but he spoke with Mr. Richard Romani, Store Manager, and he informed him that the store on Oslo Road will remain a Winn-Dixie. Mr. Romani assured him that he would still be here for the Veterans in the community and there would not be any restrictions on how much Winn-Dixie could help out.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) December 6, 2023

The next meeting of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is scheduled for December 6, 2023, at 9:30 a.m.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Today’s meeting adjourned at 10:21 a.m.

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