

**VETERANS MEMORIAL ISLAND SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, November 3, 2021 – 9:30 a.m.
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

PRESENT: John Michael Matthews, Curtis Paulisin, Carolyn Lange, and Michelle Dale **Also Present:** Deputy City Clerk, Sherri Philo, Assistant City Attorney, Jenny Flanigan (arrived at 9:34); and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absence: Melissa Arndt

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Sherri Philo, Deputy City Clerk, called the 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. SWEARING IN OF NEW MEMBERS – DEPUTY CITY CLERK

Ms. Philo performed the Oath of Office en masse.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Philo stated that they will hold the election of officers. At this time, she opened the floor for nominations for Chairman.

A) Chairman

Mr. Paulisin nominated Mr. John Matthews for Chairman. Mrs. Lange seconded the nomination. With no other nominations, Mr. John Matthews was unanimously appointed as Chairman of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee.

B) Vice Chairman

Mr. Matthews nominated Mr. Curtis Paulisin for Vice Chairman. Mrs. Dale seconded the nomination. With no other nominations, Mr. Curtis Paulisin was unanimously appointed as Vice Chairman of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

This item was discussed after item 7.

Mr. Rob Medina, Representative for Congressman Bill Posey, said he would like to invite everyone to attend a Veterans Day parade in Palm Bay and the Grand Marshall will be Congressman Bill Posey.

The Air Force Pararescue will be performing a fly over with their new HC-130J plane at 100 feet above the crowd, so it will be a close and personal experience. He thanked the Committee members for everything they do for the community.

Mrs. Lange asked what day is the parade.

Mr. Medina replied that it is this Saturday, November 6, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

Mr. Paulisin asked Mr. Medina to thank Congressman Posey for everything he does for Veterans in Florida and the entire United States.

6. NEW BUSINESS

This item was discussed after item 6-B).

A) Ms. Jenny Flanigan, Assistant City Attorney, to go over the Sunshine Law

Ms. Jenny Flanigan, Assistant City Attorney, asked to table this item until their next meeting. She explained that they are in the process of developing a new presentation to make it more interactive and engaging for the members. She explained that as members of an Advisory Board, they are subject to the Florida Sunshine Law. This means that any discussions on matters that might perceivably come before the Committee have to be held at a publicly noticed meeting, where minutes are taken, and there is public comment. She said they will talk more about this at their next meeting when she gives the full presentation.

At this time, Mr. Matthews asked each of the Committee members to introduce themselves for the benefit of the listening audience and the other members.

B) Veterans Day Application – November 11, 2021

This item was discussed before item 6-A).

Mr. Matthews announced that the Veterans Day ceremony is scheduled for November 11, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. He reminded the viewing audience to bring a lawn chair, because seating is limited on Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. The Veterans Day ceremony will be combined with dedicating the new World War I (WWI) monument. He explained that the Island was the vision of Mr. Alex MacWilliam, a WWI hero who returned and served the City and the State in various positions. The WWI monument is the classic doughboy design of a soldier stepping up and pushing the troops forward. He continued with a brief announcement of the guest speakers and some of the events that will take place during the Veterans Day ceremony. He stated that they received the approved application from the Indian River County Veterans Council to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for the Veterans Day ceremony.

Mr. Paulisin made a motion to accept the application from the Veterans Council to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary for the Veterans Day ceremony. Mrs. Dale seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

At this time, the Committee discussed item 6-A).

C) Application for Military Funeral Honors for Wilbert Thornton – November 13, 2021

Mr. Matthews stated that they received another approved application from Mr. Randy Thornton requesting to use the Island for a memorial service for Vietnam Veteran Wilbert Thornton on Saturday, November 13, 2021. They are expecting approximately 20 people to attend and it is being arranged by the family with the help of Strunk Funeral Home.

Mr. Matthews made a motion to accept the application to use the Island for the memorial service. Mrs. Dale seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Matthews said not only is the Island used for Veterans Day and Memorial Day, it is also appropriate to use it for memorial services of deceased Veterans, military promotion ceremonies, or military retirements.

Mr. Matthews said he would like to go back to their discussion about Veterans Day and the dedication of the WWI monument. He stated that over 33,300 Floridians served in WWI, so it is good that they are honoring those individuals with the monument. He reported that the bayonet on the WWI doughboy statue was already damaged. It looks like it was bent and then bent back, so it has a kink in it. He said perhaps they should think about putting a camera on the statue.

Mr. Matthew Mitts, Public Works Director, said it was disappointing to see the damage to the statue, but they want it to look good for the Veterans Day ceremony. He would like feedback from the Veterans Memorial Island Committee on what they think should be done. He has reservations about working on it and then it gets damaged for Veterans Day, because right now it does not look that bad. He can try to have it look as straight as possible for the ceremony, but he is hesitant about letting anyone else work on it.

Mr. Mathews said that it is not bad, but if they bend it too many times the metal will get fatigued and it might break off, so it might be better to leave it the way it is through Veterans Day.

Mr. Mitts said they contacted the casting company and they informed him that it could be worked on with mallets. Since it is bronze, it is fairly soft so he wants to make sure they have a good method for repair.

Mrs. Dale asked if the foundry that made the statue was in Florida.

Mr. Matthews replied yes. It was the American Bronze Company in Sanford, Florida. He said the whole project took about nine (9) months and they did a good job.

Mrs. Lange stated that she lives near Riverside Park and she walks there all the time. She said since COVID, there have been people moving here from all over and she has noticed a change on how people treat the Park. She has picked up trash several times and it was never like that before. There is a sign that states people can be fined up to \$500 for violating the rules. She said she likes Mr. Matthew's idea of having a camera on the Island. She has observed people on bicycles and playing loud music on the Island, but it is a Sanctuary and a place to reflect and they should respect the purpose of the Island. She feels that with all the new people and the changing town, they need to think about how to enforce the rules.

Mr. Matthews said he agrees that some people think of it as a Park, but it is a Sanctuary and it has the same dignity and decorum as a cemetery. He said if they did have a camera, he is not sure who would monitor it.

Ms. Flanigan said the City Attorney's office will reach out to the Vero Beach Police Department on what security measures can be taken to prevent that from happening again.

Mr. Matthews explained that a big part of the Veterans Day program will be recognizing the seven (7) WWI Veterans that are memorialized with cenotaph markers. He stated that 4.7 million people served in WWI, two million were deployed, 204,000 were wounded and about 117,000 Americans died. He said a lot of people died from the Spanish flu 100 years ago. It was a pandemic like what is going on today. It is hard to imagine, but in total there were 40 million casualties during WWI. He stated that the total cost for the WWI monument was almost \$30,000 and it was all paid for with donations.

Mrs. Dale said it is good that they are having this dedication this year because May 23, 2021 was the 100th anniversary of when the WWI fallen began to be returned to the United States. Also, November 11, 2021 will be the 100th anniversary of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

7. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Matthews stated that they did not have a meeting last month, but there are several events taking place soon that involve the Island. One (1) is the walk-a-thon for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide awareness. He asked Mrs. Dale if she would like to speak on this, since she is the Chairman of that Committee.

Mrs. Dale announced that the walk-a-thon for military Veterans Suicide Awareness is on Sunday, November 7, 2021. It is important to her, because as a Gold Star Mom who lost her son in Afghanistan she understands the pain. In 2019 they had their first walk-a-thon for military Veterans Suicide Awareness and it is something she has to keep doing. It will take place at Riverside Park at the Grand Pavilion where they will have their opening ceremony. She gave a brief report on what will take place and the people who will be involved with the event. She said when the walk begins she will be one (1) of the front people carrying a Gold Star Mother's flag. She explained the route they will follow, which includes walking through Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. They will have representatives there from the Dogs for Life and the Mental Health Association, who work in collaboration with the Gold Star Mothers. She continued talking about the many sessions that Veterans and first responders can attend to talk about their service and the pain and issues they are struggling with. She said this is helping the Veterans so that they do not lose them to suicide, because there are 22 Veterans dying from suicide every day. She said participants can register on line at Iregoldstarmoms.org, or at the day of the event. She encouraged everyone to come out and show their support for the Veterans.

Mr. Matthews said the purpose of Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary is to honor those who died in service for the Country. No one is buried on the Island, but there are cenotaphs that honor those that were from Indian River County. He handed out a diagram showing the names of the individuals with cenotaphs and what conflict they served in (on file in the City Clerk's office).

Mrs. Dale explained that they also have the Gold Star Grove which is for honoring Gold Star Mothers and their families who are transplants to Indian River County. She spoke about some of the Veterans who are recognized on the Gold Star Grove trees.

8. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

Mr. Matthews stated that the previous Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee approved an application for the Wreaths Across America to lay wreaths and hold their ceremony on the Island. He said he was told that someone from the Rotary Club was paying for all the wreaths for Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary, so they are all taken care of.

Mr. Matthews explained that a Korean War Veteran approached him and asked if a tree could be planted to the west of the Korean War monument, because the sun is quite bright. He said the Korean War Veterans offered to pay for it, so he will follow up on this to see what they can do.

Mrs. Lange asked what does it cost to maintain the Island on a yearly basis, or is it included as part of Riverside Park.

Mr. Matthews replied that they have money in an account that has been donated to the Island for its upkeep and repairs.

Mr. Paulisin stated that figure would be a line item in the City's budget and it is available to the public if they want to know.

Mrs. Lange stated that she knows there are a lot of rules with maintaining the mangroves, but she noticed that everything is getting really tight. She thought they should have an Arborist take a look at doing some trimming of the overgrowth. She said you cannot see a lot of the water and she thinks that the mangroves could be trimmed, so they are not obstructing the view.

Mr. Matthews suggested that they invite Ms. Nanette Haynes, Grounds Maintenance Manager, to their next meeting to discuss the grounds maintenance of the Island and the request to plant a tree.

Mr. Matthews explained that a cannon was donated to the City by Mr. Bob Bouclas, who offered it to Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary. However, the prior Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee decided it was not the proper place for it, so the City is looking for another location to display it.

Mr. Matthews stated that the Veterans Memorial Island bridge repairs are being done now and they are making progress. This project was budgeted at \$130,000, but there are plans to replace the bridge at a cost of about \$1.3 million in the next few years. He explained that there is a talented Architect who works part time in Vero Beach and he has been helping with some ideas for a World War II (WWII) monument, but he also asked what the design was going to be for the new bridge. He said the Committee will need to come up with some ideas of what it could look like aesthetically.

Mr. Matthews reported that a former member of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee, Mr. Don Wickstrand passed away. Mr. Wickstrand was a Navy Captain and a past President of the Navy League.

Mr. Matthews said they no longer have a stage to use on Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary and they have discussed building a permeant raised platform around the center circle. They also discussed honoring the WWII Veterans on the front of the platform, so it would combine both projects. This project will be a couple years down the road, because they will have to raise the money for the project first. He said a Veterans organization will have to take charge of the project and accept the donations.

9. MEMBER'S MATTERS

Mr. Mathews asked to have a copy of the City Resolution pertaining to the rules and uses for Veterans Memorial Island sent out to all the Committee members.

Mr. Paulisin said that the Veterans of Indian River County and the Vietnam Veterans held an event and raised about \$2,000. The money will go to Every Dream Has a Price to help build a new triplex for homeless Veterans. They are leaning towards making it an all-female triplex, because they currently don't have one (1). Mr. Paulisin said a retired Judge, Sandy McLaughlin, moved here and purchased an old hotel on Royal Palm Boulevard. She and her husband developed it into a 20 unit affordable housing project called James Arthur Court and they are helping Veterans who might be at risk of becoming homeless.

10. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) December 1, 2021

The next meeting of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is scheduled for December 1, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Today's meeting adjourned at 10:27 a.m.

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