

June 5, 2007
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Vice Chairman Jeff Marker and members Matt Hewatt and Pasco Gibson. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), County Engineer (Roger Blaylock), and Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde). Vice Chairman Marker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Gibson moved approval of the minutes from the May 1, 2007 meeting; Hewatt seconded, and the vote carried unanimously. (3-0)

Waterway Access Funding Alternatives

Marker said the Marine Advisory Committee has composed a list of possible alternative funding options for public waterway access land purchases. He asked committee members if they have any additional alternative funding ideas. Marker said he would like the Marine Advisory Committee to send the list of suggestions and any new suggestions to the Board of County Commissioners for their input at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

Hewatt said boaters with vessels smaller than 16' without motors are not required to pay registration fees, and therefore, do not contribute to the boater registration fund. Marker asked if the Marine Advisory Committee can require boater registration fees for boats in this category. Walker said he is not sure. He said there might be legal issues, but he will check. Marker asked if boat ramp user fees can be charged for vessels that do not pay anything into the boater registration fund through registration fees since boater registration fees are not charged to these vessels. Blaylock asked if the committee is suggesting that all boaters be required to pay boat ramp user fees. There was discussion on problems enforcing this requirement if implemented.

Gibson said he felt a minimal boat ramp user fee is a good idea. He suggested a \$5 or \$10 annual pass allowing use of any boat ramp in Santa Rosa County. Marker asked what will be done about out-of-state and out-of-county users. He asked if the County has had any experience with Iron Guardians. Blaylock said the County does not have any experience with this type of honor collection boxes. He said he felt the money will be stolen if not collected daily, especially at remote locations. Gibson asked about the possibility of charging boat ramp user fees on weekends only. There was discussion of putting someone at the larger boat ramps on the weekends to collect boat ramp user fees.

Gibson said he has a private boat ramp that has a honor collection box and most boaters that use his ramp pay. He said using an unmanned iron honor collection box will generate income for the County. Marker said he felt most users will pay.

There was discussion on the size of County boat ramps.

Gibson asked if both an annual user sticker and voluntary payment boxes can be implemented at boat ramps. He said he felt signs can be placed at boat ramps stating "If you are not an annual pass holder, please pay here." Gibson said some money is better than none. Blaylock said staff can look into this suggestion. There was discussion on the honor pay system used at Blackwater State Park. Hewatt asked if this idea will raise enough revenue to justify it. Gibson said he felt it will.

Marker said the County has to start somewhere. He said he has not heard any opposition to boat ramp user fees. Marker said he does not feel it is fair to require Santa Rosa County boaters to contribute to the boater registration fund and pay a user fee, and people coming in from out-of-state use the ramps for free. He said some type of system needs to be implemented to require out-of-state boaters to pay to use the County ramps. Marker said he also felt it is not fair for canoers and kayakers to use boat ramps and not contribute to the boater registration fund.

Hewatt said, as a kayaker, he felt it will be easier to use a "pay as you go" user fee. He said most kayakers try not to use boat ramps because they tend to get in the way of motorized boats, but sometimes it cannot be avoided. Hewatt said kayakers are more than willing to contribute to the boater registration fund but would like a little consideration in the design of future boat ramps for their vessels.

Gibson asked if any boater registration funds are earmarked for land acquisition. Walker said all boater registration funds are consolidated for boat recreation purposes. He said most of these funds are used for ramp improvements. Gibson said he felt it might be a good idea to commit 25% of the boater registration fees for land acquisition purposes. He said several different revenue generating ideas will have to be used to acquire land for water access. Gibson said Santa Rosa County has a lot of boat ramps, and there has to be a way to generate funds from people using them.

Walker said land acquisition is expensive and will require creative revenue generating ideas. He said he felt the list needs to be revised before being brought before the Board of County Commissioners.

Marker asked if a waiver of the Manatee Fee can be granted to help with land acquisition if registration fees are slightly raised. There was discussion on the legal issues concerning fees and the procedures that must be followed.

Marker questioned cars parking in boat ramp parking spaces not having to pay a fee. Hewatt said he felt a parking fee should be implemented at boat ramps so that everyone that uses the boat ramp parking area will be contributing. Marker asked if there are problems with parking at County beach boat ramps. Blaylock said sometimes yes. Hewatt said people are parking cars in one boat trailer parking spot knowing these spots are reserved for boat trailers. He said the problem is there is not anywhere else for them to park except on the side of the road. Hewatt said another problem is that local businesses are using the parking lot for their employee parking. He said he felt the parking can not be limited to boat trailer parking due to limited parking for beach goers. Marker asked if the County has been receiving complaints from boaters about the parking situation at the beach. Walker said he has not heard any complaints.

Marker asked staff to bring back information on additional registration fees (how much money possibly generated, restrictions, waiver of Manatee Fee, and how much able to direct to land acquisition), the legality of applying some type of fee to vessels under 16' including kayaks and canoes, and how to collect funds from out-of-state tourists.

Hewatt said he felt out-of-state tourists will gladly pay to park their boat trailers at County boat ramps because most condo association laws prohibit boat and trailer parking on their property. There was discussion on the problem with out-of-state

tourists parking their boat trailers at the boat ramps the entire time they are visiting here.

Gibson said he felt part of the boater fees need to be set aside immediately for land acquisition. Marker said he agrees with using part of the existing funds for land acquisition but said money needs to be left in the fund to cover reef funding, boat ramp funding, and other boating projects. He said setting aside 25% of the fund is a good amount for land acquisition.

Marker said he felt the iron collection boxes need to be implemented at a couple of boat ramps to see if it is a feasible revenue source. He said the iron boxes will be much cheaper than hiring someone to collect money. There was discussion on how much the boat ramp user fee should be and at which boat ramps iron collection boxes need to be tried.

Gibson said he felt the Marine Advisory Committee needs to have more discussion on these revenue suggestions before bringing them before the Board of County Commissioners.

Hewatt asked if the County has any Iron Guardian boxes. Blaylock said no. He said the County might be able to build some. Walker said Tammy Simmons might be helpful with the implementation of the iron collection box system. There was discussion on the legality of implementing the iron collection box system at Navarre Beach.

Chairman Issues

Marker asked if staff has addressed the Archie Glover Boat Ramp situation with the Interstate 10 bridge contractor as discussed at the last Marine Advisory Committee meeting. Walker said he is not sure. He said he will get Avis Whitfield to contact committee members with an update on this issue.

Other Issues

Gibson asked about the filling in of the waterway by the Interstate 10 bridge contractor. There was discussion on the contractor denying responsibility and refusing to dredge the waterway. Gibson said boaters can not use the area in the winter because the area is too shallow.

Walker said the Board of County Commissioners authorized the port-a-lets at the three locations the Marine Advisory Committee recommended. Marker asked what funds were used. Walker said boater registration funds.

Verlinde said on June 14 th there will be a sea turtle friendly beach program. Blaylock said this is in conjunction with the conditions of the County dune restoration renourishment project. He said the County has adopted a turtle lighting ordinance for Navarre Beach. Blaylock said the County has sent out letters to residents on the beach as part of the education process. He said a second set of letters will be sent out before code enforcement officers begin enforcing this ordinance. Blaylock said there will be fines and penalties for violating this sea turtle ordinance. He said DEP and Fish & Wildlife have stated the County beaches will be dark for this endeavor from May 1 through November 1. Verlinde said the plan for the June 14 th sea turtle friendly beach program is to inform citizens how to comply with the ordinance, teach sea turtle biology, and then take a walk on the beach.

Election of 2007/2008 Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Marker said the Marine Advisory Committee needs to elect a chairman and vice-chairman.

Hewatt moved to nominate Marker as Chairman; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (3-0).

Marker moved to nominate Harris as Vice-Chairman; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (3-0).

Walker said this is usually done at the first of the calendar year and suggested this election be through December 2008. The committee agreed with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman serving until December 2008.

Adjournment

Hewatt motioned to move the July 3, 2007 Marine Advisory Committee meeting to July 10, 2007 at 5:00 p.m.; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (3-0).

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee, the meeting adjourned at 5:52 p.m.