



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

**MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
MARINE ADVISORY BOARD
FORT LAUDERDALE FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT
528 NW 2ND STREET, STATION #2
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33311
3RD FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM
THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2024 – 6:00 P.M.**

**Cumulative Attendance
January-December 2024**

Steve Witten, Chair	P	1	0
James Harrison, Vice Chair	A	0	1
Tyler Brunelle	P	1	0
Robyn Chiarelli	A	0	1
Barry Flanigan	P	1	0
Robert Franks	A	0	1
Elisabeth George	P	1	0
Brewster Knott	P	1	0
John Lynch	P	1	0
Norbert McLaughlin	P	1	0
Noelle Norvell	P	1	0
Ed Rebholz (arr. 6:30)	P	1	0
Bill Walker	P	1	0
Robert Washington	P	1	0

As of this date, there are 15 appointed members to the Board, which means 8 would constitute a quorum.

Staff

Andrew Cuba, Marine Facilities Manager
Jonathan Luscomb, Marine Facilities Supervisor
Sergeant Travis O’Neil, Marine Unit Supervisor
Fort Lauderdale Commissioner John Herbst
Carla Blair, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc.

Communications to City Commission

None.

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

The following Items were taken out of order on the Agenda.

III. Statement of Quorum

Roll was called and it was noted a quorum was present at the meeting.

IV. Waterway Crime & Boating Safety Report

Marine Unit Sergeant Travis O'Neil reported the following activity for December 2023:

- 28 calls for service
- 1 burglary
- 41 citations

Mr. McLaughlin commented that there did not seem to be communication between the Marine Unit and the rest of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department investigating crimes that occur on land instead of on the waterway. Sgt. O'Neil explained that if a marine item is stolen on land, a land unit will take the report and turn it in to a Detective, who then contacts the Marine Unit to share details of the case. The time frame varies for this information-sharing between units.

II. Approval of Minutes – December 7, 2023

Motion made by Mr. Walker, seconded by Mr. Rebholz, to approve the minutes. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

V. Dock Permit – 607 Cordova Road / Mike Pitino

Mike Pitino, Applicant, explained that he and his wife are interested in using an existing dock which was previously permitted on the property. There are no material changes expected.

Motion made by Mr. Rebholz, seconded by Ms. George, to approve. In a roll call vote, the **motion** passed unanimously (11-0).

VI. Industry Expert – Ocean Rescue Alliance International / CEO Shelby Thomas

Shelby Thomas, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Ocean Rescue Alliance International, joined the meeting via Zoom at this time. The organization is a 501(c)3 nonprofit which is based in South Florida, with five artificial reef sites throughout the region.

Ms. Thomas explained that Ocean Rescue Alliance International is a marine conservation and restoration entity. Their focus is on building artificial infrastructure that replicates natural marine geology and aids in the restoration of corals, oysters, and mangroves. They create artistic artificial reefs which can serve as ecotourism destinations. All their

sites implement educational and citizen science programs through partnerships with academic institutions and continued research that contributes to sustainable restoration.

Coral reefs around the world are among its most biodiverse ecosystems, preventing coastal erosion and aiding in restoration. They are valued at over \$3.4 billion in Florida alone. Difficulties affecting coral reefs include pollution, habitat degradation, and disease. One issue specific to Florida is bleaching due to temperature, and in 2015 Florida reefs experienced stony tissue loss disease.

Historically, artificial reefs have consisted of items including construction pilings, culverts, ships, and tires. While many of these sites create habitats, they typically lack eco-friendly materials as well as the biodiversity space required of a complex habitat. Ocean Rescue Alliance International creates artificial reefs that intentionally mimic natural reef geology, with both micro- and macro-habitats to support different life stages of fish as well as restoration technologies. These include coral locks made from eco-friendly, pH-neutral materials.

In addition to habitat reefs, the Alliance also creates designs intended for other purposes, such as coastal protection. They produce breakwaters which reduce wave energy by 75% when implemented in scale. They also restore corals, oysters, mangroves, and fish habitats, and stimulate ecotourism through art.

Ms. Thomas noted that one of the Alliance's biggest eco-art projects is *A Thousand Mermaids*, which began in West Palm Beach. Four additional reef sites are planned in Florida in 2024.

Once sites are created, the Alliance works to enhance local engagement with the community. They conduct workshops, beach and dive site cleanups, and restoration and monitoring efforts. They also have a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program that focuses on underprivileged youth and brings awareness of marine resources and job opportunities to communities.

The Alliance has out-planted over 30,000 corals with different academic partners and practitioners in South Florida, using coral locks and coral fragment plugs. They use site-specific smaller structures which permit out-planting on natural reefs. Designs are informed by local ecology.

Ms. Thomas concluded that Ocean Rescue Alliance International hopes to build ecosystems that protect against coastal erosion, support marine life, and aid in restoration while using art to create a connection with the public.

Mr. Rebholz requested clarification of the group's source of funding. Ms. Thomas explained that projects are funded in various ways, including municipal entities such as Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs). A CRA in the city of Hollywood has funded the reef site there. They also bring in grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA) and other entities, including local artificial reef grants. They also seek grants related to tourism and art in public places. Once the location of a project has been identified, the Alliance works with local partners, including private and corporate donors, to share in the distribution of costs.

Chair Witten advised that he would follow up with Ms. Thomas on ways the Marine Advisory Board (MAB) might be able to help Ocean Rescue Alliance International in its efforts.

VII. Discussion – New River Moratorium

Chair Witten introduced Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner John Herbst, who had joined the meeting. Commissioner Herbst thanked the Board members for volunteering their service to the City, emphasizing the importance of the marine industry as well as the marine lifestyle to Fort Lauderdale.

Ms. George commented that many of Ocean Rescue Alliance International's efforts are based in other South Florida communities but not in Fort Lauderdale. Commissioner Herbst noted that the CRA in Hollywood encompasses a great deal of that city, while Fort Lauderdale's Beach CRA, which could have contributed funding to a similar effort, sunsetted in 2022. He added that reef restorations could serve as generational projects for the City, but was not certain of whether or not the City's budget would permit funding for these types of efforts. Chair Witten observed that the MAB's focus on the New River moratorium is also a generational concern.

Chair Witten asked if there are any efforts on which the City Commission felt the Board should focus. Commissioner Herbst advised that most of the items that come before the Commission are dock waivers and permits, some of which can be contentious. He noted the importance of balancing the interests of different parties, from small boaters to the commercial industry, and concluded that the Board has expertise in this area.

Chair Witten addressed an issue with the commercial vessel *Carrie B*. Mr. Flanigan commented that he felt moving this boat further west would not be fair. He also pointed out that the City Commission has approved the proposed moratorium on the New River, which will ensure no waivers are issued for areas of that waterway until stakeholder input can be heard. He concluded that it would be wrong to ask the *Carrie B* to move further west, and that the United States Coast Guard continues to monitor discussion of this issue.

Mr. Flanigan added that the ongoing issues facing the *Carrie B* have bypassed the Board, which is tasked with overseeing commercial activity and leases on the New River. He expressed concern that they have not heard and discussed this matter.

Chair Witten further addressed the New River moratorium, noting that no member of the City Attorney's Office was present tonight to provide additional information. He noted that

he had attended the December 20, 2023 Planning and Zoning Board meeting with other members of the marine community, and that the moratorium received unanimous support from that advisory body.

Chair Witten continued that another concern is when public meetings can begin with regard to the moratorium. He suggested that a special meeting could be scheduled on the same date as the Board's regular March 1, 2024 meeting. Mr. Cuba clarified that he would need to advertise the additional public meeting as well as the regular Board meeting.

Chair Witten also noted that a bathymetric survey of the New River is not yet complete. Mr. Luscomb advised that this item is expected to go before the City Commission for approval at their second January 2024 meeting.

Chair Witten emphasized that the Board's work on the moratorium is a team effort. He encouraged the Board members to submit comments to Mr. Cuba's office for distribution among the members so a master list of concerns and comments can be created.

VIII. Old / New Business

Mr. Lynch requested an update on a proposed structure in the Little Florida community. Chair Witten replied that the property owner plans to build an observation deck as well as a dock. No action has been taken thus far, and dialogue with the owner is ongoing. The owner has been invited to attend MAB meetings.

Chair witten continued that representatives of Captains for Clean Water have been invited to attend the Board's February 2024 meeting.

Ms. George advised that a significant amount of seawall has been constructed for the redevelopment of the Las Olas Marina. She pointed out that a City-owned section of this seawall is in poor condition. The City is currently working with developer Suntex Marina to determine how to address this portion of the marina's seawall. This issue will be an Agenda Item at the City Commission's January 9, 2024 meeting. She concluded that she would send additional information to Mr. Cuba's office so it can be shared among the Board members.

Chair Witten reported that the Board's July 2024 meeting date has been changed from Thursday, July 4 to Tuesday, July 9, and the Thursday, November 7 meeting has been changed to Tuesday, November 12.

Chair Witten also introduced Pierre-Philippe Beaujean of Florida Atlantic University, who was present at the meeting.

IX. Adjournment

Marine Advisory Board

January 4, 2024

Page 6

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.

[Minutes prepared by K. McGuire, Prototype, Inc.]