

**VETERANS MEMORIAL ISLAND SANCTUARY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
Wednesday, October 7, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.  
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

**PRESENT:** Chairman, John Michael Matthews, Vice Chairman, Joel Herman, Members: Curtis Paulisin, Don Wickstrand, Alternate Member #1, Sylvester McIntosh, and Alternate Member #2, Peggy Lyon **Also Present:** City Attorney, John Turner; Public Works Director, Matthew Mitts; Assistant Public Works Director, Donald Dexter; Recreation Director, Jim O’Connell; and Records Retention Specialist, Heather McCarty

**Excused Absence:** Barbara Fallon

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Matthews called today’s meeting to order at 10:00 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 2, 2020**

Mr. Matthews said that the minutes reflected that Mr. Curtis Paulisin had an unexcused absence and he recalled Mr. Paulisin saying that he wouldn’t be there.

**Mr. Herman made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2, 2020 Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee meeting as written with that correction. Mr. Paulisin seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**5. NEW BUSINESS**

**A) Proposed Sign for Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary – Ophelia Angelone, Rotary Club of Vero Beach**

Ms. Ophelia Angelone, President of the Vero Beach Rotary Club, said they would like to put a sign on the Island as a thank you to the Veterans from Rotary, of which there are five (5) clubs here that would all participate. She is here to find out if that would be allowed, what kind of sign did they want, how big did they want and where would they want it.

Mr. Matthews referred to the Ordinance that governs Memorial Island. He said he looked it over and found a little bit of a snag. He appreciates all the great work that Rotary does and all the things they do in the community. He read under Section F-2) Monuments, which says, “only Veterans Organizations sponsoring a monument may be recognized as part of the monument.” He felt the

intent was to keep individuals from putting just anything up, so only Veterans organizations sponsored monuments could be recognized. He questioned if a sign could be constructed that thanks the Veterans for their service. He commented that he didn't know how their organization would feel about not having their name on it.

Mr. Paulisin agreed and said that is the first thing that went through his mind. He asked Ms. Angelone what they wanted to put out there, if it was just a sign that says they support their Veterans.

Ms. Angelone answered just a thank you to the Veterans for their services. Mr. Paulisin agreed and said that as much as they would like to have something like that there, maybe it could go outside the Island. He suggested something saying they support them (Veterans), which he thinks is within their guidelines if it outside the Island. He said they put that in there for just that reason, they didn't want every person in town wanting something there. He knows they are great and do a lot of great things for the community. He suggested an alternate site, such as the foot of the bridge.

Ms. Angelone said they could look into that.

Mrs. Lyon suggested they should talk to the City Manager and the City Attorney about the sign Ordinance as it applies to Riverside Park.

Mr. Matthews felt that it would be even more visible if it was outside the Island.

Mr. Paulisin suggested that Ms. Angelone goes back and talks to her group, and also talks to the City Manager. He believes if they have something at the foot of the bridge, everybody would see it and see that they support them and he thinks that is a novel idea. He suggested they come back to them.

**B) Request to use the Island for the Veterans Day Ceremony – Mr. Jim Romanek, Veterans Council of Indian River County**

Mr. Jim Romanek, Executive Director of the Veterans Council of Indian River County, said they received permission from the City Manager to proceed with putting on their Veterans Day Ceremony. He said that they held a virtual event on Memorial Day without any public so they are happy to be putting on this event November 11<sup>th</sup> if they get permission from the Committee. They will have the typical protocols they do with the ceremony as always, but they are putting Covid-19 precautions into position. They will have masks and hand sanitizer available and they will be wiping down the golf carts who will be transporting the elderly after each ride. They will be encouraging social distancing and watching that and monitoring that with volunteers. With their approval today, they will go to the Recreation Department and ask for their stage and PA system. He commented that the guest speaker this year is Lieutenant Curtis Holden, who is retired from the army. Also, they will be having the Vero Beach High School band playing and they will social distance them as well.

Mr. Matthews commented that the band probably won't have as many people and there probably won't be as many out like usual, so social distancing should be a little easier.

Mr. Romanek agreed. He said it is a very nice solitude area and people do come to their events but they will do everything they can and have signs up that social distancing is required. They will be providing the items that they can, such as masks.

Mr. Paulisin asked about how many people are they expecting, including the Color Guard and the band. Mr. Romanek said that in the past they have had about 1,500 people show up on Veterans Day. They are speculating hopefully 500 people. Mr. Paulisin asked if they were going to have a cutoff. Mr. Romanek answered no and questioned how they could have a cutoff since it is a public park.

Mr. Matthews suggested they could have Scouts or Veterans at the bridge encouraging people to spread out and keep their distance. Mr. Romanek said they are planning on doing that. He added that the seating will be arranged so that people can't sit so close together unless they are immediate family. He reiterated that they will have all provisions available and they already have them ready to go. As far as water goes, there will not be any passing out of things. The Boy Scouts will be placing them on a table while wearing gloves so people can walk by and grab them.

Mr. Paulisin asked if the programs would be done the same way. Mr. Romanek said the programs will be in a box and there will be someone in gloves passing them out.

Mr. Matthews commented that they are a very patriotic community, but there are still people not quite ready to go out so he doubted they would have the same crowds they have had in the past.

Mr. Romanek agreed. He added that a couple of senior living facilities have asked him if they are going to live stream. He explained they are attempting to do that on Facebook Live and then it could be posted and shared.

Mr. Matthews commented so some of the assisted living places will be able to celebrate Veterans Day. Mr. Romanek said he hopes so. He noted that Renaissance Senior Living Facility has five (5) WWII Veterans living there.

Mr. Paulisin said one of his biggest concerns, even with the golf tournament he did, is that someone would come back and comment on the number of golfers there and say that because of him having that tournament, he caused people to get COVID. He said everyone was wearing masks and they took precautions, which it sounds like they are going to do that also. He just doesn't want any flack towards the Veterans.

Mr. Herman commented that he would be glad when the ceremony happens because it is due and they need to definitely have it.

**Mr. Paulisin made a motion that they approve the request to allow the Veterans Council to use the Island on Veterans Day. Mr. Herman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

Mr. Matthews reminded him that this meeting is televised and even though this is approved, if Mr. Romanek is available for their next meeting, they could talk about it again to help to spread the word.

## **6. OLD BUSINESS**

- A) Parkinson and Alzheimer Association Request to use the Island – November 14, 2020 – Mrs. Peggy Cunningham and Mrs. Judith Lemoncelli**

Mrs. Peggy Cunningham, Executive Director for the Alzheimer and Parkinson Association, talked a little about the services their support organization provides and pointed out that everything is free to Indian River County residents. She explained that they provide support to the most vulnerable and had to stop all their programs and classes back in March and went digital offering videos, zoom classes, activity kits that they would drop off. They also called 250 families every week. She said they are just now reopening with some “one on one” programs and small limited classes. They are very protocol minded and they all get tested every two (2) weeks.

Mrs. Cunningham said this would be their 17<sup>th</sup> annual Walk to Remember and it is their basic fundraiser for their operating fund, with their operations being around \$700,000. In the past, they have been very gracious to allow them to use Riverside Park for the walk through the Park. She explained how it is going to look a little different this year in the way they are doing it. They will have PPE there for everyone and they will encourage social distancing. Families can walk together and then the groups will be spaced out. They are thinking they will have perhaps 200 walkers. She said the funds are raised not just by the walkers, but are being raised now by people who create teams and have fundraisers and also through sponsorship. They are asking again if they can use the Island as part of the walk. They routinely have people out there to tell walkers that is the time for reflection and that it is to be quiet on the Island, with no litter left behind. This year they will also remind them as they go onto to the Island to space out. At the beginning, they will have a Color Guard and a singer for the National Anthem. She said they generally bring the Veterans on stage, however this year, they will probably be in front of the stage. She pointed out that some of their groups are doing a walk in their own areas, such as Indian River Estates and Pointe West.

Mr. Matthews asked if the main gathering area would be under the Oaks and if they have already gotten the approval from the City. Mrs. Cunningham answered yes, they just received that approval on Friday. Mr. Matthews asked if the Island would just be a part of the walk with no tables set up or stages there. Mrs. Cunningham answered yes. She said the tables would be setup under the Oaks and spaced apart. She added that they have always started the walk with a big group, but this year they will be spread out.

Mr. Matthews commented that it is a little after Veterans Day on November 14<sup>th</sup>. He wanted to make sure that it would not be a whole herd going on to the Island at a time so as not to impact the Island very much and give some walkers time to appreciate the Island. Ms. Cunningham answered yes.

Mrs. Lyon asked if they are going to limit the booths where water and food are given out to people, which is a concern of hers. Mrs. Cunningham said they will be talking to all of the health companies about what they can hand out. She commented that food is probably not going to happen. The application includes the use of the entire Park, so they will have plenty of room to space out.

Mrs. Lyon asked if they were going to have the stage like they always have. Mrs. Cunningham said they are not sure about the stage yet. She said everything is toned down because of expenses so they do have it ordered, but whether that is something they are going to use, they will have to decide because it is an expense.

Mrs. Lyon commented good for them for thinking all this through and she finds it unimaginably brave and courageous the way non-profit groups are stepping up during these times to make these things happen.

Mrs. Cunningham said their staff are very happy that they can do what they do.

Mr. McIntosh commented that their organization through the years has done a great job and in 2012, he brought his father there so he knows the job and his hat goes off to their organization.

**Mr. Paulisin made a motion to approve the request to use the Island. Mr. Herman seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.**

**A) Request to use Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary by Wreaths Across America – Mr. Rick Lewis**

Mr. Rick Lewis, with Wreaths Across America, said once again they plan on doing wreaths this year. They have a total of 663 wreaths collected at this point, which is down quite a bit from what they have done in the past. This is their third year. He said more donations are coming in. He said he stills need to go in front of City Council for approval to go into Crestlawn. He would like this Committee's permission to go and do their ceremony on the Island, which will be run by Joe and Sue Crowley and he will run Sebastian. He put on the application 50 people, but he doesn't know how many people will be there this year. The ceremony is at noon on December 19<sup>th</sup> and they will request some help from the Veterans Council to get that setup. He noted it would be a short ceremony.

Mr. Matthews noticed they needed to have the gates open to get trucks over there with the wreaths and expressed concern about the bridge. Mr. Lewis explained that just one (1) pickup truck with the wreaths would drive over to unload and set up and then drive back out so they can lock the gates and no one else could drive in. Then when they pick them up around the first Saturday in January, the gates could be opened just for the one (1) truck to drive in and get them and then drive back out with them.

Mr. Matthews commented that this is really a beautiful tribute to their Veterans at the holidays.

Mrs. Lyon asked him to let the viewing audience know how to donate to his cause for additional wreaths. Mr. Lewis said they would go to the Wreaths across America website and go to locate fundraising groups and there you can donate directly to Crestlawn, Veterans Memorial Island, Sebastian or any of the other area cemeteries. He commented that there are several groups that have offers, such as if you go through his group, for every two (2) wreaths you purchase for \$15 each, they get a third for free. It is their goal to cover every service member in Indian River County. He can be contacted at 772-913-1717 and he will pick up donations or come and talk.

Mr. Matthews added that it is a worthy cause and does make the Island and the cemeteries look beautiful.

**B) Status of Proposed Plaque for the Korean War Veterans Monument – Mr. Joe Gomez, Korean War Veterans Association**

Mr. Matthews said that Mr. Joe Gomez was invited to attend today's meeting to give an update on the proposed plaque that is going to go on the Korean War monument. He said they are in the process of working on getting the bronze plaque cast. It is identifying it as a Korean War memorial by the Korean War Veterans Association. He said one of the good things about this is the Korean War Veterans are adding a little bit of information. It will have the dates, which were June 25, 1950 to July 27, 1953 and the words, "all gave some and some gave all." He said some might not realize the casualties, which were 54,247 died, 185,284 were wounded, 7,245 were Prisoners of War and there are still 8,175 unaccounted for who they presume they are dead and

their bodies not recovered. He feels these are things that people should know when they walk by these monuments. Then they are going to end it with “freedom is not free.” He said they are going to try to have it dedicated to recognize the end of the Korean War on July 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **C) Further Discussion on a World War I Monument**

Mr. Matthews stated there is no Veterans organizations for World War I (WW1) and there are no veterans who are alive from WWI. He said the idea of a WWI monument was started by a WWI veteran, Alex MacWilliam. Now they are looking for input from the community on ideas that might help. He showed a little sketch he drew of a cement slab like they have for the Korean War monument. He said he did a little research on the medal for WWI. He said an idea is they could have the front and the back of the bronze medal from WWI and maybe a little information, such as the dates, the countries involved and the number of casualties. He pointed out there were 40 million casualties, 20 million died and 21 million wounded in WWI. He said 9.7 million were military and 10 million were civilians. He added the United States didn't enter the war until later, but there were 117,000 deaths. He said they don't need all that out there, but felt they should have something on the Island for WWI to honor them and because it was WWI veterans that started the idea for the Island, which they are very lucky to have.

Mr. Paulisin questioned who they have that is going to take this idea. He said he agrees with everything he said, but is there going to be an organization who takes it on.

Mr. Matthews said he has mentioned it to the Veterans Council and they have talked about it here at these meetings. He said there are a few organizations that have offered donations for it and they have received some already. He knows the Marine Corp League is eager to donate.

Mr. Paulisin said his question is who would promote it. He said it sounds like they are here promoting this, but they are an Advisory Board. Mr. Matthews said they first brought it up because they realized there wasn't a Veteran's organization from WWI. He said the American Legion was formed in WWI and they talked about it initially when they first brought it up. Is it appropriate for them to fill in a blank of a missing monument that should be there and he thinks it is okay for them to do that. He said the City would not pay for it; they would get donations. He does not think money is going to be an issue. He said they could either scrap it and not do it, or they could ask a Veterans organization if there would be one who wants to take the lead. He suggested others could submit ideas.

Mr. Paulisin said that if there are others that are going to take the lead, they should come in and speak with this Committee.

Mr. Herman said they have always been proposed by the organization who then went to the Veterans Council for approval and then comes to them. But he said if nobody does it, and no organization wants to step up and do that, and it defaults to them, then they need to do it because it is long overdue.

Mr. Turner said he thinks what they are doing is a healthy discussion and if it gets closer, they can make a legal analysis if they want him to. But he thinks it is a very healthy talk about it now and discuss it to get some ideas and get a path to that direction and then he would be glad to participate as to what is appropriate.

Mr. Matthews said something might be more appropriate than the medals on the monument. He pointed out the Vietnam monument has the Vietnam service medal. He said if they went that

direction then they would want to make sure they have the appropriate medal for the WWI monument.

Mrs. Lyon said when they talked to Mr. Gomez about the Korean War memorial, they talked about putting the Korean medal on it, but she isn't sure if it made it on the memorial. But she agreed the WWI medal would be a really good way to honor WWI veterans.

## **6. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS**

Mr. Matthews commented that the Island looks great. He said the Purple Heart monument has lost some of the plantings around it. He noticed the mangroves are growing right up to there. He wasn't sure if they were allowed to cut those. He suggested around the Purple Heart monument that those plants could be donated by that organization. His biggest concern was all the mangroves.

Mr. Don Dexter, Assistant Public Work's Director, said they would look at it. He said they can do some trimming for maintenance purposes.

Mr. Matthews said the Gold Star Mothers are requesting a Suicide Awareness Walk. He said Michelle Dale is leading the charge for this 2<sup>nd</sup> annual walk for Military Suicide Awareness. He sees a conflict because she is asking to walk on November 14<sup>th</sup>, which is the same day as the Alzheimer Awareness Walk at the Park. He would speak with her later because there would be a conflict to have two (2) organizations walking the same day. Mr. Paulisin agreed. Mr. Herman added that it would be too much congestion.

Mr. Matthews said he will see her later at the Veterans Council and will talk to her. He added that it is a worthy cause and there are way too many Veteran suicides.

## **7. MEMBER'S MATTERS**

Mr. Paulisin said there was an article in the paper regarding the golf tournament, which was very successful. They raised \$20,000 for the Veterans housing that they have here in Indian River County.

Mrs. Lyon commented great job.

Mr. Wickstrand stated that October 13, 2020 is the 245<sup>th</sup> Navy birthday anniversary and they cannot forget the Navy.

Mr. Matthews said he noticed on the circle where the small flag is there are little markers with some strings. He asked if those are permanent. He said it kind of looks tacky, but they do want to keep people off the grass.

Mr. Matthews commented that people don't really read the signs, but they are not supposed to have dogs on the Island. But people will go on there with their dogs and have picnics. He also said people have been feeding the squirrels and now the squirrels will come right up to you and are aggressive. People also ride their bikes there because it is a beautiful Island, but it is not a Park; it is a sanctuary and has the same dignity and decorum as a cemetery.

Mayor Tony Young said he wanted to take the opportunity to tell everyone on the Committee how much he appreciates what they do. He said Veterans Memorial Island is one of the best tributes to their Veterans in the nation. He doesn't think there are enough opportunities to say thank you to

everyone who makes it happen and it always is a team effort to make it happen. What the Committee is doing is super important because they are the lead in the community to share the love of the Island. He said they understand in their fiber what it means to serve this Nation. In these days of social unrest, craziness, the understanding of living for the values of our Nation and liberty and justice and expressing that and understanding what their families and communities have done really builds them as a community and is reflected by the people who come here. He said people say this place is special and different and Alma Lee Loy conveyed that every day. He said this place is special because of the people that come here and give of themselves. He said thank you to the Recreation Department because many people don't realize how much the Recreation Department does with the sound system and all of the coordination that goes on. He said with the efforts to help families who have lost a family member and want to go out to the Island and do a memorial, all of that is facilitated through them and the Recreation Department and also Public Works. He has learned just how important the City staff is. He noted that Mr. Don Dexter will be retiring in 2021. He commented they have legends in their midst that will be passing the baton and it impacts them Citywide and community wide. He said last weekend, the American Legion called and wanted support for a drive by recognition for Mr. Edward Shields, who turned 101 years old and lives alone. He said that was facilitated by Mr. Herman. He talked about Mr. Shields and the 5<sup>th</sup> armor division and when they landed on the beaches of Normandy. He remarked that these men and women have made us who we are. He said they have an icon in their community that was recognized by Mr. Alex MacWilliam back in the WWI timeframe. He pointed out that Mr. Rob Medina is here today from Congressman Posey's office.

Mr. Young reported that Coffee with the Mayor will be Friday at 8:00 a.m. at the Heritage Center. He said if there is something he can do for them, to let him know.

## **8. NEXT MEETING DATE**

### **A) November 4, 2020**

The next meeting of the Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary Advisory Committee is scheduled for November 4, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

Today's meeting was adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

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