

SEPTEMBER 21, 2016 – WORKSHOP

The Board of County Commissioners, Walton County, Florida, held a Workshop on September 21, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. at the Walton County Courthouse in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida.

The following Board members were present: Commissioner Sara Comander, Chairman; Commissioner Cecilia Jones, Vice-Chairman; Commissioner W. N. (Bill) Chapman; and Commissioner Cindy Meadows. Mr. Larry Jones, County Administrator; Attorney Mark Davis, County Attorney; and Mr. Jay Tusa, TDC Executive Director; were also present.

Chairman Comander called the meeting to order.

Mr. Brian Kellenberger, TDC Director of Beach Operations, briefly discussed the beach maintenance statistics which included: trash collection FY 2015 and 2016, Leave No Trace collections FY 2016, and Code Enforcement statistics. He reported there were fewer bags of trash picked up in 2016 than 2015. He announced the beach maintenance crews are now responsible for the Leave No Trace collections, which are made nightly in accordance with the ordinance. Mr. Kellenberger stated there were 3,471 contacts made in 2016; with 904 verbal warnings, 101 written warnings, and 68 citations. The increased number of code officers on the beach has been beneficial. He said there were 196 complaints filed with Code Enforcement.

Mr. Kellenberger briefly discussed the Code Enforcement Activity Report. He announced 167 vendor permits were issued in 2016 for 59 vendors. There were 142 permits issued in 2015 for 60 vendors. He noted there was an increase in specific place permits which indicate a number of vendors are contracting with private property owners for exclusive use of that portion of the beach. Mr. Kellenberger discussed the different types of complaints which were received with the majority of the complaints concerning ghost set-ups, early set-ups, and storage at the toe of the dunes. He briefly addressed the 50% rule in which the vendors are limited to certain areas of

public beaches. He said a lot of calls were made regarding signs, posts, and ropes on the beach. He reported there is a decrease in the horizontal distance on the east end of the beaches and the smaller areas cause increased congestion.

Commissioner Jones asked how many of the vendors were Walton County residents. Mr. Kellenberger stated a report would be created to identify the number of vendors from Walton County and estimated 5-10% of the vendors were not from Walton County.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the number of early set-ups and if those vendors participated in the turtle watch notification program. Mr. Kellenberger said all of the vendors are a part of the turtle watch notification program which is a requirement of the permit application. Commissioner Chapman asked if there had been any altercations between turtle watch groups and vendors. Mr. Kellenberger stated there were no physical confrontations. Commissioner Jones asked if early set-up citations were given to tourists. Mr. Kellenberger said that proper notice must first be given before a citation can be issued. Once the tourists were noticed, they typically complied.

Commissioner Meadows discussed complaints she had received about chair set-ups being too close to the water's edge and not allowing room for walking. Mr. Kellenberger stated the ordinance does address the issue by stating the vendor must set up a reasonable distance from the water's edge. Discussion ensued regarding the interpretation of the word reasonable and the need for clarification in the ordinance. Mr. Kellenberger stated verbiage amending the ordinance would be brought back for review. Commissioner Meadows voiced concern with the possibility of a decrease in tourism if this issue is not addressed.

Commissioner Jones discussed ghost set-ups and clarified some vendors are contracted by condominiums to set-up a certain number of rows for their guests. Mr. Kellenberger reported

that upon investigation some of the complaints were unfounded due to private contracts. He said delivery vendor permits do not allow for early set-up on the beaches. He stated some vendors have weekly or annual contracts with rental properties which are not gulf front properties. Mr. Kellenberger said a lot of the ghost set-up complaints are due to the renters requesting their chairs be set-up and then not being using all day. Solutions to this issue will be addressed in the Beach Vendor Management Plan. Discussion continued on investigating complaints.

Commissioner Meadows addressed the recent purchases of gulf front property by the county and the need to look into contracting with vendors as a revenue stream. Mr. Kellenberger addressed regional beach accesses and maintaining the rights of upland property owners through written authorization for vending. Commissioner Meadows reminded everyone that a promise was made to the western beach property owners that they would have the right to say no vending.

Commissioner Chapman discussed complaints he had received from permanent residents who have to fight with vendors for beach space. He recommended that some of the recent gulf front property purchases be designated vendor free. Commissioner Meadows questioned if designations could be made. Attorney Davis said it could.

Chairman Comander asked if specific distance from the water's edge could be applied to contracted vendors. Mr. Kellenberger discussed the erosion control line on the western end of the beaches and the mean high water line on the eastern end of the beach. Attorney Davis said currently removal of all materials after dark on all beaches is allowed and regulations could be implemented for vendors. Mr. Kellenberger said this issue should be considered when creating the Beach Management Plan.

Commissioner Jones suggested a locals only beach for residents of Walton County. Mr. Kellenberger said that would work in conjunction with a vendor free beach.

Discussion continued on placement of chairs at the water's edge, labeling chairs with renter names, and utilizing a manned kiosk for scheduling chair rentals.

Chairman Comander asked if there had been issues with food vending along the water's edge. Mr. Kellenberger reported there was an isolated incident with an ice cream vendor, but the issue was settled by a judge in favor of the county. He said the ordinance prohibits food and beverage vending on the beach.

Commissioner Meadows asked when the proposed Beach Management Plan would be presented for review. Mr. Kellenberger stated it would be presented October 11, 2016.

Several citizens came forward to discuss the need for more beach enforcement officers, no ghost set-ups, only allowing tents at the rear of the beach, vending authorization from upland property owners, better enforcement for dogs on the beach, citing tourist as well as vendors for ordinance violations, limiting the areas maintenance vehicles are driven, increased trash pick-ups, and encouraged the use of apps to allow vendors and public to notify appropriate personnel when issues arise.

Some vendors spoke in opposition of implementing a setback from the water's edge for chair set-ups siting it would cause an economic impact to the vendors.

Chairman Comander suggested having representatives at each public beach access to welcome the visitors and inform them of the beach rules. Mr. Jay Tusa, TDC Executive Director, said the TDC is considering using their beach ambassador program to inform the visitors at regional beach accesses.


Commissioner Jones expressed the need for a more comprehensive beach plan which includes increasing the number of beach accesses, advertising the state parks, and addressing the problem issues.

Mr. Tusa stated special events on the beach would also be addressed in the Beach Management Plan.

Chairman Comander suggested contacting the state to open the other parks as they did with Topsail.

Commissioner Meadows reported there were only eight acres of public beach; leaving four acres not used by vendors. She said the Beach Management Plan should also be viewed from a planning perspective.

There being no further items to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

Approved: 
Sara Comander, Chairman

Attest: 
Alex Alford, Clerk of Court and County Comptroller