

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP
COURTHOUSE ANNEX, COMMISSION MEETING ROOM
MAY 17, 2022
1:30 P.M.
MINUTES**

Commissioners Present: Ricky Jones-Chairman, Bert Boldt, II-Vice-Chairman, Noah Lockley, Joseph Parrish, Jessica V. Ward

Others Present: Michael Shuler-County Attorney, Michael Moron—County Coordinator

1. Call To Order

Chairman Jones called the workshop to order. Thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

2. Prayer and Pledge

Chairman Jones led the Board in prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Comments

Chairman Jones explained public comments would be divided into two groups: Alligator Point and St George Island.

Ms. Lyra Erath spoke to the Board about the possibility of pressuring the State to expand Bald Point parking.

Ms. LeeAnn Korst spoke against public parking in the residential area and would like the public access points returned to the owners.

Mr. Charles Bladon Korst indicated that he believed the original development of the access points was for local use only. He would like to close all three access points to non-Alligator Point residents. He suggested creating access points with barricades that would only accommodate golf carts and foot traffic.

Mr. Marvin Heymann spoke regarding wanting a resolution noting a big piece of property owned by the county and discouraging people from coming.

Chairman Jones asked the audience to refrain from applauding.

Mr. Kenneth Clizbe suggested charging a \$25 fee to park along with a \$300 fine for illegally parking. He suggested hiring a seasonal employee to enforce.

Mr. Mike Booders refrained from speaking.

Mr. Dick Hosford asked the Board to come up with a solution. Inquired as to if the boulders were a liability.

Mr. Gary Darpel spoke regarding reverting the beach access back to the residents. He noted the signs for public beach access and parking could be removed and boulders left. He said then the Sheriff could come over and take care of it how he chooses. He gave each of the Board members a handout. He indicated that he believes the accesses were given to residents at the dedication.

Mr. Chris Crosby suggested utilizing the old KOA property and shutting down the accesses until public restrooms could be created.

Ms. Nonda Meng noted that a short-term cost-efficient solution would be to add more barriers.

Mr. Mark Schmidt suggested eliminating public parking and noted the issues with having no restrooms.

Mr. John Berry said the residents are the ones that are supposed to be the benefactors of the beach access. He suggested having dedicated officers from March through October.

Mr. John McCarter noted that illegal parking isn't just on Island Drive, and it affects all of the residents.

Mr. Ben Houston supported the Sheriff's idea of large boulders and would like to see this plan implemented within three weeks. He said APTA would like to partner with the County to develop a long-term parking plan. He suggested having a parking lot with a payment box, and someone to monitor and send tickers for non-payment. He noted there are no handicap-accessible spaces at this time.

Mr. Eldred Wynne Eden expressed concerns about putting boulders on roads.

Mr. Bucky Mitchell spoke as an owner who does not live on the beach but relies on friends with beach access. He expressed the need for a resolution that would allow everyone who lived on Alligator Point access to the beach.

Ms. Debbie Brett suggested putting up a directional sign so that people know where public parking is located. She spoke against adding additional parking areas.

Ms. Pat O'Connell spoke about people parking on Franklin Blvd center noting this is the area designated in 2018 as the area to be improved. She said this is a new issue and she just wanted to get in front of it.

Mr. David Covington said there are two issues parking in the public section of the commercial district and mobile food trailers. He suggested getting them to move parallel so that it doesn't cause a traffic jam. He noted that the parking is a safety issue and suggested putting up designated signs for public parking.

4. Sheriff's Department – Beach Parking Issues Update

5. Board Discussion

Sheriff Smith noted that there isn't much of an update and they have been in a holding pattern. He said there have been a lot of mixed feelings and suggestions. He said the parking issue is certainly not going away unless it is addressed. He said that he felt their resources are better spent on other issues within the county. He noted that he believed the larger rocks where we have overflow adjacent to the three parking areas would be beneficial. These rocks would need to be large enough that you can't just pick up and move them. Chairman Jones noted that he has been working with Duke Energy asking them to move the power poles from the right of way on East and West Gorrie so that we can designate parking areas there. Sheriff Smith noted that St George Island and Alligator Point are very different, and that parking violation isn't normally as much a problem on St George Island. He said until a resolution is reached his department is now complaint driven. He doesn't think it's a good way to use resources patrolling parking. Doing this takes away from officers being able to enforce speed limits, drunk driving, etc. Chairman Jones asked Captain Ward what kind of time is taken to deal with each parking violation. Sheriff Smith said that every situation is different. If a wrecker is available and they can hook it to the car they can handle it that way. Sometimes situations are on the verge of becoming physically waiting for the tow truck. It could take 15 minutes to hours depending on the situation. Chairman Jones said that in dealing with ten illegally parked cars, one officer could spend their entire shift. Chairman Jones said he has tried to avoid additional signage but at this point does not see any way around it. Lt. Ward

noted that it is not the same people every weekend. Commissioner Parrish said there is a disrespect for law enforcement across the county. Some of it has to do with the Covid effect, people wanting to get out and about. He noted that we need a temporary solution before summer to avoid being overwhelmed. Lt. Ward noted that there have been multiple complaints about speeding. Sheriff Smith noted that he would much rather be dealing with the speeding and DUIs than trying to get cars off of the right of way. He said that all deputies have radars and there is zero-tolerance for it. Chairman Jones noted that whatever solution we come up with has to be enforceable. Sheriff Smith noted that even a temporary fix will help reduce the time officers are spending on it. Commissioner Boldt said that all Franklin County beaches are created equal but are not the same. He outlined several steps and phases to address the parking at Alligator Point which included adding barriers by June 15th, putting a directional sign at the intersection of Bald Point, and adding electronic signs with some language like 'park wrong, be fined', paying to park with a dedicated officer to enforce and banning dogs and alcohol on public beaches. Commissioner Ward noted that she had taken a trip to Alligator Point recently. She suggested putting up a gate at the public beach with a keypad for residents only. However, she noted in doing this the homeowners would be solely responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the road. She suggested other options which included marking parking spaces appropriately, adding an old, marked police car with a decoy, and adding boulders. She suggested making the old KOA property a parking lot with beach access. Have a kiosk and pay to park, add port-a-potties temporarily. Use the parking fees to facilitate the costs associated with it. On St George Island she suggested marking spaces and designating how the food trucks should park to allow for additional parking. Commissioner Parrish noted that there are mixed opinions and no easy solution. If the county is going to spend ten million dollars to renourish the beach he believes we should have a mechanism to put the beach back in the event of a storm. He inquired of Attorney Shuler if shutting the beach access points down would be discriminatory and would even be legal. Commissioner Parrish noted that there is no easy solution to the problem. Attorney Shuler addressed the matter of cutting off public access to a public beach. One person sent him a message reminding him that the road at the plantation, which was once a public road, is now closed. He said there is something in the record he could take a look at. To my knowledge, public property for public use with public funds has always been a policy of the board. In 2001 there was a similar issue on St George Island, and on behalf of the county, Attorney Shuler said he engaged in litigation to establish as a matter of law that the beaches were public beaches. The three public beach access points at Alligator Point are similar in nature to those on St George Island. He will go back and look at them again, but not aware of anything that would designate them as private beaches. Commissioner Parrish asked if the access was closed would it be closed to everyone. He said he is of the opinion that public access to a public beach is for everyone. Commissioner Boldt asked Attorney Shuler to research if the barriers can be used so that we can get them out there. Chairman Jones said some of these things we need to find a way to do quicker versus later. He said he does not want to be having this same discussion next May. We are seeking to find answers to the problems. He suggested at the next meeting discussing what can be done on a temporary basis and then a permanent solution. We are dealing with growth management. Mr. Moron noted a small group may need to meet with AFTA to determine a short-term and long-term fix.

6. Adjournment

Chairman Jones thanked all of the attendees for attending the workshop and for the information provided. There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Ricky Jones – Chairman

Attest:

Michele Maxwell – Clerk of Courts

The audio is available upon request. Please e-mail jgay@franklinclerk.com, call 850-653-8861 to speak with the Administrative Assistant, or submit a request in writing to obtain audio of this meeting.