



Fort Myers Beach Town Council

**Town Hall Council Chambers
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931**

Minutes

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

9:00 AM

ORDER OF BUSINESS

I. CALL TO ORDER

Members present: Mayor Allers, Vice Mayor Atterholt, Council Member King, Council Member Safford and Council Member Woodson.

II. INVOCATION

Town Clerk Baker.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. APPROVAL OF FINAL AGENDA

The parents of the ad hoc committee will have a presentation to inform the public. Council Member King moved to approve the amended final agenda, seconded by Council Member Safford.

The motion carried unanimously.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jenny Tardiff Paradiso, resident, started the presentation with Why Are We Here? Beach Elementary Historical & Current Status, The First Beach School, The Second Beach School, The Third and Current School, US National Register of Historic Places, Grade A School and Partnerships. John Kloss continued with a synopsis of the interlocal agreement (ILA) signed between the district and the town a few years ago. The presentation continued with Hurricane Ian, ILA Process, Synopsis of Agreement, Where We Were Day Before Milton, Cost per Student and Reasons for Concerns. Vice Mayor Atterholt asked if anyone in the room had been contacted by the consultant regarding the viability of the beach school. No one was contacted. Mr. Kloss noted that, despite what the Director of Operations stated, business owners and developers were not contacted about children attending the school. Mr. Kloss discussed the weekly update sent to parents regarding misconceptions about FEMA reimbursement.

Patrick Vanasse reviewed the Demographer's Fallacy, Approved and Proposed Projects and Commitments to Support Beach School. Monica Schmucker addressed the ILA, stating the cafeteria would be built by June of this year. Nothing prevented them from building it. She pointed out that the school board

numbers included other funding, but they did not specify the funding sources when discussing \$8,000.00 per student. She continued with Hallmarks of our Public School System and busing children to other schools. She noted that the School Board unanimously voted to enter into the agreement for the phased rebuild after Ian. She discussed how the town was fulfilling its end of the deal, but the School Board hired a consultant for around \$200,000 to figure out a way to negate the ILA.

Mayor Allers cautioned that the town had not yet seen the consultant's study, so they did not know whether a recommendation to close it was among the five construction options. Mr. Kloss revealed that the consultant was hired in April after the construction options were agreed on and the board would not confirm whether another option to close it was a possibility. Ms. Schmucker added that they trusted the process and that is why it took them over eight months to call a meeting to discuss the agreement they agreed to uphold. Mr. Vanasse asked the town council and the town attorney to try to accelerate things. He noted that Cypress Middle School was torn down and would be rebuilt within one year. He was told kids would not be at the beach school next year.

Public comment:

Jennifer Rusk, resident, shared a childhood experience from when she was five about how important her school was to her when her brother was sentenced to prison. She described sitting next to Charles Manson while visiting her brother when she was 10 or 11. She described her trauma when Charles Manson grabbed her hair and the guards pulled her away. Her school was her safe place from everything going on in her life. She hoped the school district would ensure the school was accessible to their community.

Ellie Bunting, resident, read her comments about the school and thanked the council for their support and voice. She asked that they continue their support. Alexis Cooper discussed how the beach school took care of her daughter and made her feel loved. She did not want to send her kids to school in Lee County because she did not trust that they would treat her children like the beach school teachers. She thanked the Town for its support.

Jacki Liszak, President of the Beach Chamber of Commerce and resident, stated that the business community was committed to supporting the school and would do whatever it takes to make sure the school stays intact. She noted that the beach school was critical to the community and would remain so for generations to come. She implored the school board to honor their commitment and uphold their end of the bargain.

Kathy Young of the Fort Myers Beach Kids Foundation thought that the school board was kicking the can down the road. She asked the council to speak with the board to inform them of the community's feelings.

Fran Myers discussed the history of the beach, the school and how the community consistently came to the aid of low-income individuals and the school itself. She described how the community came together to build the playground. She thanked the council for their help.

Larry Wood, former principal, discussed the school spirit and the community's

support. He offered to help in any way he could.

Deborah Grohl, President of the Beach Kids Foundation and resident, commented that they knew where the beach schools came from. She noted that, as a relator, it was hard to sell houses without a school in the community.

Rosanna Riley, resident, noted that the beach school was essential to the community and the children should not have to ride buses for hours to go to school.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA

A. Fort Myers Beach Elementary School

A discussion regarding the status of repair and the future of the Fort Myers Beach Elementary School, including but not limited to the terms and conditions of the Interlocal Agreement between the Town of Fort Myers Beach and The School Board of Lee County, Florida, regarding the Fort Myers Beach Elementary School.

Town Attorney Stuparich began the presentation with Resolution 20-45, including shared-use facilities. Director Hauge indicated that the school playground was operational, but the community was unable to access it. The town offered to put in a fence for security, but he never received a response. The playground was part of the agreement and the town fulfilled its part.

Town Attorney Stuparich continued with Resolution 21-23, Resolution 21-35, and Resolution 23-35, discussing the school board's responsibilities on page 7 of the materials, as well as the default provision and Section 7.4 regarding enforcement of the agreement through court proceedings. She stated they needed to obtain a copy of the consultant's report to come up with some direction. She added that an open public records request was pending for the report. An option was to draft a resolution stating that it was the town's policy to promote beach enrollment and to ask businesses and developments to participate in the effort. Another option was to litigate, but Florida law requires mediation to occur before litigation.

Council Member Safford commented that they needed to see the report and could not believe they had not received it after repeatedly asking for it. He felt the whole thing was a shame.

Council Member Woodson asked whether the meeting on June 3 was a workshop. Mr. Kloss replied that there would be a workshop at 1:00 p.m. to discuss the beach school, followed by a regular board meeting that evening. The beach school was not on the regular meeting agenda and he thought the final decision would be made at the end of July. Council Member Woodson stated that people needed to attend the workshop to show their determination. Mr. Kloss indicated that ad hoc members would send them emails requesting an audience. Ms. Schmucker revealed that their agenda allotted 30 minutes for the beach school discussion and there was time for public comment during the workshop. There were 11 items total on the agenda. Mr. Vanasse explained that if more than 30 people want to speak, the board will allow one minute per person. He requested that they be

allowed to cede time to each other for an organized presentation, but they have not received a response. He suggested that the town council send the request rather than the parents.

Council Member King was beyond frustrated and the fact that they spent at least \$200,000.00 on a consultant irritated him. Honoring agreements was a big issue for him.

Vice Mayor Atterholt described the members involved in the ad hoc committee. The inability of Dr. Savage to give a direct answer as to whether the viability of the school was on the table was a direct violation of the ILA. If they want to amend the ILA, they should lead with that, so people know what is happening. He encouraged people to contact the elected school board members and Superintendent so they could hear from the community. He added that the new superintendent ran on the premise that the beach school was critical to the beach. He felt there was a lack of communication and that the board members should tell them if they were unsure of their course of action. Vice Mayor Atterholt was annoyed that the consultant did not reach out directly to anyone impacted, particularly since they had not been informed of the scope. He noted they needed to be careful when reviewing the report because the inputs were flawed and they should not accept the premise.

Mayor Allers noted that he met with the superintendent on Friday and felt she was open to discussion and honest about not having all the details. He commented that the school board members had been supportive. As for a sixth option, she had not yet seen the consultant's report and would spend the weekend reading it. He stated the final recommendation would come from her and the town had fulfilled its part of the ILA. All they want to do is get their kids back into the school. He suggested that the town manager and town attorney work with their lawyers before June 3 to ensure they do not have to reiterate everything they went through in the past. He thought it was a good idea to direct staff to request concrete programs from developers to drive enrollment at the beach school.

Vice Mayor Atterholt moved that the town do everything possible to ensure the preservation and longevity of the beach school and request that the town manager and town attorney ensure the school district adheres to the ILA, seconded by Council Member King.

The motion carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Discussion was held regarding obtaining the report, draft and scope of work before the next council meeting on June 2.

Traci Kohler, former principal, stated that they received an international grant from the Rotary Club and explained why it was a big deal. Some of the funds allowed the school to purchase sunshades over the basketball courts. She described how the funds were used for educational opportunities, equipment and programs for the students. She summarized the difficult choices she had to make when downsizing staff.

**VII. MOMENT OF SILENCE - TO BE HELD ON OAK STREET IN FRONT OF THE
FORT MYERS BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

VIII. ADJOURNMENT - AT FORT MYERS BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Council Member King moved to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Safford.
The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.

Minutes adopted as presented, June 16, 2025. Motion by Council Member King
and seconded by Council Member Safford.
Passed 5-0.

Jason Freeman

Jason Freeman, Deputy Clerk/Legislative Liaison