

SUMMARY MINUTES

ISLAMORADA, VILLAGE OF ISLANDS PARKS & RECREATION CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, August 21, 2025

Meeting started at 5:01p.m. at the Founders Park Community Center

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Carolyn Wightman, Shannon Cary, Natasha Early, Ted Benbow, John Weare, Christy Hughes (via Zoom), Richard Russell, Alina Davis, Maria Bagiotti (IVOI), Anne Onsgard (IVOI)

ABSENT:

Joseph Jannach – Justified
David Epstein - Justified

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman asked Ron Saunders to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETINGS:

Ted Benbow motioned to approve the minutes from the July 10th meeting. Natasha Early seconded.

EMERGENCY AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS:

Moved item VII – Park and Pool Fees Discussion to next meeting.

Carolyn asked Village Manager Ron Saunders for updates on the Baseball Field discussion. Ron shared that he had spoken with the Village Council and was instructed to proceed as planned. He met with the Baseball Task Force, attended a School Board meeting, and gathered community input. A community survey included a question about a new concession building, but Ron discovered an existing building near the first base line with all the facilities needed. He proposed using this existing building instead of constructing a new one behind home plate, which had originally received objections. He suggested moving the press box and other functions to a location near the third base line, a plan supported by all Council and School Board members. This change could save \$1.5 to \$2 million. He also learned that artificial turf costs were not yet factored in, as vendors hadn't been contacted.

Ron Saunders received direction from both the Council and School Board to consider removing the second building from the baseball field design and instead renovate the existing building along the first base line to serve its functions. He believes the School District may agree to fund necessary upgrades, like installing air conditioning. This

recommendation is based on community feedback favoring fewer new buildings. Ron noted ongoing confusion over whether the Village or School District is responsible for the field and proposed that the School District take full responsibility for year-round maintenance, to be formalized in a written agreement. This proposal will be discussed at the October 7th Council meeting, after the September budget sessions.

Carolyn reminded the Committee that they had supported the Village Manager in moving forward with preliminary planning and recommended artificial turf for the baseball field. She clarified that a final decision between natural and artificial turf hasn't been made yet, though artificial turf is favored. Ron confirmed the design is still preliminary and subject to change. He also noted that while the Village will provide use of the field, the School Board will be responsible for all costs and maintenance.

Alina asked about when the baseball field is used for other programs, and Maria replied that summer camps mainly use the soccer field. Alina expressed concern that artificial turf gets too hot in summer, making it potentially unsafe for kids. Ron clarified that this meeting wasn't meant to reopen the turf debate, though the topic will continue to be discussed. Alina brought it up because she thought Ron implied the School District would back out without artificial turf. Ron clarified that the School District had originally favored artificial turf, but the final decision rests with them. He is simply updating the Committee on building recommendations, and nothing is finalized. Richard Russell added that current cost figures are only estimates and include adjustments due to earlier miscalculations.

Carolyn clarified that there's no final decision yet on natural grass vs. artificial turf—just a general leaning toward turf. She noted that the Committee hasn't received a formal presentation on turf-related details like cost, safety, maintenance, or materials—only anecdotal input from community members. Ron explained that this is because the School Board hasn't yet engaged with turf vendors. He likened turf options to different iPhone models, highlighting the variety available. His priority is ensuring the Village doesn't delay the renovation, though the School District will ultimately decide which turf to use.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Carolyn Wightman opened Public Comment to provide the community with an opportunity to voice their concerns regarding topics from this meeting's agenda.

Speakers included:

Captain Ed Davidson, Chair of Florida Keys Citizens Coalition
Jerry O'Cathey
Elizabeth Brown
Larry Zettwoch
Tony Hammon
Jamie Engel

Margie Smith

Ted expressed surprise that artificial turf is being proposed for the multi-use athletic field. He also agreed with Jamie that future maintenance costs need to be budgeted, except for the portion of the field that Ron said the Village will not be responsible for.

FOUNDERS PARK MASTER PLAN, FINAL DRAFT PRESENTATION AND INPUT
– Miller Legg and Associates:

Liudmila “Lumy” Fuentes from Miller Legg and Associates clarified that the Master Plan serves as a guideline or vision for Founders Park, with elements that may be considered for future implementation. The plan spans 15 years, with each budget cycle providing an opportunity to select aspects of the plan to pursue. It is a conceptual plan, not a set of construction documents. Lumy emphasized that the recommendations combine Miller Legg’s professional expertise with extensive community and user group feedback.

She recapped the process since July 2024, including stakeholder interviews, data collection, visioning workshops, surveys, and drafting the Master Plan. Miller Legg was aware of an existing plan for the baseball field. Lumy noted that 4,450 statistically valid surveys were distributed, covering nearly all households—with a remarkable response rate of almost 12%, significantly higher than the typical 1-2%.

She presented a summary of survey and interview findings, explaining that Miller Legg recommended artificial turf for the multi-purpose athletic field to increase usage and reduce maintenance downtime. However, community feedback indicated this was one of the least favored elements of the conceptual plan. She stressed that this recommendation is flexible and open to further discussion, including the possibility of using artificial turf for practices while keeping games on natural grass. She presented the proposed addition of a marina/staff only park entrance near the Village Hall area, as well as a second lane at the existing entrance for residents only. She gave additional details on other conceptual facilities and designs of the Master Plan, throughout the proposed phases of the plan.

John Weare suggested that natural grass should be used for the multi-purpose athletic field, based on his research regarding injuries in different field sports on natural versus artificial turf, as well as heat related illnesses on artificial turf. He also mentioned that the overall cost would be less for natural grass, although it would require a more elevated level of maintenance. He motioned that the Committee endorse to the Village Council to adopt the Miller Legg recommendation for improvements of the main entrance including a dedicated lane for Village residents. Ted seconded the motion, and the motion passed (6-2).

John also motioned that the Committee endorse and recommend to the Council to adopt moving the maintenance (Public Works) area to the southwest corner of the park, in keeping with the Miller Legg diagrams and proceed with the expanded recreation area to

the eastern side of the park, including the proposed “Airnasium” and expanded number of pickleball courts. Ted seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (8-0).

The proposed Founders Park Fee Schedule discussion has been moved to next meeting due to time constraints, to allow for a proper presentation and conversation regarding proposed fee changes under the Parks and Recreation department.

Carolyn opened additional public comment to give community members an opportunity to speak on the details discussed in the Miller Legg presentation.

Speakers included:

Jamie Engel

Sandi Bisceglia

Captain Ed Davidson, Chair of Florida Keys Citizens Coalition

Lumy expressed that this presentation was solely a general overview of the conceptual elements of the Master Plan. A future report will be presented to include cost estimates.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Founders Park Fee Schedule Discussion

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman set the next regular meeting date as TBD in September. Ted Benbow made a motion to adjourn, Richard Russell seconded. The meeting ended at 7:44 P.M.

Recording Secretary,

Alicia Mote

Minutes Approved by Committee on
Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman _____.