

Report and Recommendations of the
City of Flagler Beach
Ad-Hoc Fourth of July Findings Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Committee Mission Statement.....	4
Committee Meetings & Public Participation.....	5
Identification of Problem Issues.....	6
Traffic Congestion & Solutions.....	7
Parking Limitations & Options.....	8
Downtown Beach Issues.....	10
Fourth of July Parade.....	12
Daytime Event Management.....	14
Fireworks Display.....	15
Costs to the City.....	17
2023 and Beyond.....	18
Summary.....	19
Appendix.....	20

Introduction

This *Report and Recommendations of the City of Flagler Beach Ad-Hoc Fourth of July Findings Committee* is the work product resulting from the regularly scheduled meetings of the Committee. The Committee Mission Statement follows, as does a breakdown of the topics discussed, the research undertaken and the recommendations made, by the Committee.

In making its findings and recommendations, the Committee recognizes the historical significance and the joy that the 4th of July Celebration has brought to the residents of Flagler Beach, to residents of the County, and to visitors from all parts.

The focus on the Committee has been to provide studied suggestions to the City Commission, with input from all Flagler Beach residents who choose to participate, resulting in a variety of considerations and recommendations to improve and make safer, the City of Flagler Beach 4th of July Celebration.

Committee Mission Statement

On August 19, 2021, the Ad-Hoc Fourth of July Findings Committee (“the Committee”) was formed by the Flagler Beach City Commission under the authority of City of Flagler Beach Resolution 2021-21 (“the Resolution”). The purpose of the Committee is to discuss, investigate and plan, with City Resident input, recommendations for the City of Flagler Beach’s going forward staging of celebratory events on Independence Day. Specifically, the Resolution provides as follows:

The mission of the committee will be to investigate all aspects of the event including: safety, costs associated, demand on staff, management of the influx of people, resources required, and other associated impacts as a result of the event ad then compile the findings for presentation to the City Commission. (City of Flagler Beach Resolution 2021-21).

Accordingly, the Committee has conducted bi-weekly meetings since its formation with the goal being to discuss the historical significance of the event, and to identify and offer solutions to the challenges that have evolved with the growth of this annual event. This Report represents the issues discussed and the findings and recommendations offered by the Committee.

Committee Meetings and Public Participation

As of the date of this Report, the Committee conducted ___ regularly scheduled meetings, each of which occurred at City Hall. All meetings were properly noticed and were public in nature. Public participation was generally light, despite efforts by the Commission and the Committee members to encourage public participation.

Attendance at the meetings by Committee members was good, and meeting discussions were thoughtful and enthusiastic. This Report represents an accurate accounting of the opinions expressed by the Committee members and by those members of the public who did participate in Committee meetings, or who otherwise expressed their views and opinions on 4th of July issues to individual Committee members.

Identification of Problem Issues

From the outset of the initial meeting of the Committee on September 14, 2021, the members unanimously concluded that identifying the primary historical challenges associated with the Flagler Beach 4th of July Celebration, and crafting possible solutions for those challenges to be presented to the Commission, was the best path to success. After a wide-ranging discussion during the first Committee meeting, the members agreed that the primary challenges to a successful 4th of July Celebration are: (i) Traffic Congestion; (ii) Parking Shortage; and (iii) Public Safety as result of (i) and (ii) and issues and concerns related to significant underage alcohol consumption.

Having identified the primary challenges, the Committee began deliberations on the best means to address these challenges in order to bring about a safe and logistically sound basis for future 4th of July Celebrations. This Report contains the suggested solutions that the Committee urges the Commission to consider.

Finally, the Committee recognizes that the reconstruction of the Flagler Beach Pier, scheduled to begin in January 2023, will alter certain aspects of the 4th of July Celebration for that year and the following 2 or more years. Consequently, the suggestions made in this Report, while intended to be considered on a going forward basis, will require another look after 2022 to accommodate the logistics created by the Pier reconstruction.

Traffic Congestion and Solutions

Over time, the congestion created by the significant increase in the number of vehicles coming to Flagler Beach for the 4th of July Celebration, has presented mounting challenges to traffic flow logistics, leading up to the Pandemic, during which no celebrations occurred. These challenges are intensified by the shrinking number of parking spaces, brought about for a variety of reasons.

In its study, the Committee considered a variety of possible solutions to the issue of traffic congestion. After much deliberation, the Committee has concluded that traffic congestion will be eased and improved through the following suggested measures: (i) Implement and advertise use of a shuttle system for entry onto and exit from the island, with fare to be paid by passengers; (ii) Continued use of the North to North and South to South ingress and egress traffic flow patterns developed by Chief Doughney; (iii) Continued use and reliance on volunteer support through the Flagler County Assist program; (iv) Endorsement of visitor use of Lyft, Uber and other commercial pick up services, using the shuttle system's drop off and pick up points.

In support of these suggestions are continued use of helicopter traffic control; maximum usage of electronic signage and use of available law enforcement resources from neighboring forces to be coordinated by Chief Doughney.

Parking Limitations & Options

With a population of approximately 5200, Flagler Beach long ago ran out of adequate daytime parking for the number of visitors who attend the annual 4th of July celebration. Recent studies by the Florida Department of Transportation (“DOT”) have concluded that during peak periods, 20,000 cars per day pass through Flagler Beach. Using that figure for 4th of July estimations at 2.5 passengers per car, results in an estimate of 50,000 visitors to the city. All downtown parking spaces, including those adjacent to the Boardwalk, are usually taken by 7 a.m. on July 4th. Moreover, the number of parking spaces has decreased recently due to the loss of beachside parking South of town following the post-Hurricane Matthew repairs to A1A. *(Add # of spaces lost on South A1A).*

The Committee considered a wide range of options to the July 4th parking shortage and is able to suggest a number of improvements and additions to the parking space issue. The Committee’s recommendations center on locating additional parking inventory to supplement historical parking availability, which, for various reasons, has actually lessened from years past.

Specifically, the losses to the available parking inventory include the beachside spaces on South A1A following road reconstruction, and also the loss of use of the Forehand property immediately West of Veteran’s Park due to construction expected to begin in the Spring or Summer of 2022. This results in a

combined loss of approximately ____ parking spaces to the 4th of July parking inventory.

On the other hand, the Committee is optimistic about the availability of significant additional parking areas from commercial properties West of the bridge, following outreach made by the City Manager and members of the Committee.

Specifically, if successful, negotiations with the following entities will result in the addition of as many as 730 to the City's July 4th parking inventory:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Spaces</i>
Babcock Home Furniture & More lot	S.R. 100	260
First Baptist Church lot	Roberts Road	220
Boston Whaler lot	Sea Ray Drive	250
TOTAL Potential Added Spaces		730

The Committee urges the Commission to continue its efforts to negotiate the use of these properties for July 4th parking. But even if those efforts are completely successful, it is the belief of the Committee that there is current need to increase the July 4th parking inventory East of the bridge, to the extent any additional spaces can be located or can be made available.

Downtown Beach Issues

The Beach between North 10th Street and South 10th Street is generally packed with celebrants by 7 a.m. on July 4th. While visitors are welcome and are a large part of the 4th of July celebration, the challenges associated with increased crowd congestion generally, and underage alcohol consumption specifically, are considerable.

After examining these challenges, the Committee recommends a concerted effort by the Commission to curtail underage alcohol consumption in the downtown celebration area. The Mayor has specifically volunteered to lead an Underage Drinking Awareness Campaign, in tandem with being active in her role as Mayor in publicly supporting Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Additionally, Chief Doughney has made several recommendations concerning law enforcement presence in the area. Specifically, the Chief will continue ATV patrols during the day on the beach in the downtown area. Moreover, the Chief will call on state law enforcement agencies with whom he has associations for their support on the underage drinking issue.

Furthermore, the Committee recommends the use of COP personnel on the downtown beach walkovers during the day and continuing through the evening. In addition to the use of COP personnel, Chief Doughney will continue to patrol the

downtown area at a maximum staffing level with support from neighboring law enforcement agencies, through the relationships he has fostered over the years.

Moreover, the presence of the Flagler Beach Police Command Center at the corner of A1A and South 5th Street is expected to have practical impact and serve as a deterrent in the downtown area.

Fourth of July Parade

The Flagler Beach 4th of July Parade has been a tradition for generations. While the Committee wholeheartedly supports continuation of the Parade, there are recommended changes intended to improve the experience to the public and to participants.

While the Parade is currently under the control and supervision of the Rotary Club of Flagler Beach, the Committee recommends that the Commission establish certain guidelines concerning the parade and that these guidelines be implemented after discussion with the Rotary Club.

After deliberation and with input from residents on the topic, the Committee believes the parade is simply too long given the typical July temperatures. A shorter parade, therefore, may serve to improve the experience for the viewing public and for entrants. Shortening the parade means limiting entrants. It is the understanding of the Committee that the Rotary Club is open to and in fact supports placing some equitable limitations on the number of entrants in the parade.

Moreover, the Committee recommends that the Commission and the Rotary Club explore limiting the number of vehicles, per entrant, by setting a reasonable maximum number of vehicles each entrant may utilize.

Additionally, the Committee recommends that electronic signage be used in the days leading to the July 4th parade, so that residents are aware of potential local congestion and temporary detours associated with parade staging.

Finally, the Committee discussed possible options for changing the start time of the 4th of July parade—historically, 10:30 a.m.—given heat of day considerations. After deliberation and input from those familiar with the amount of time necessary for staging of the parade, the Committee has concluded that the start time cannot reasonably be expected to begin before its current start time of 10:30. Moreover, starting the parade at any time later in the day will worsen the heat effect on the viewing public and on entrants. Consequently, the Committee keeping the start time of the 4th of July at 10:30 a.m.

Daytime Event Management

4th of July Events staged at Veteran's Park and the Downtown area have been a hallmark during the celebration for many years. Pageants, games and music, as well as a variety of vendors, have been a part of Flagler Beach's July 4th celebration in many different formats over the years. It is the collective belief of the Committee that bringing an organized schedule of events in the area of Veteran's Park will attract those residents and visitors who wish to be festive but seek an alternative to the packed beach areas.

Attached as Addendum ____ is a proposed list and start times for events the Committee would recommend that the Commission approve. The events have all passed the test of time in Flagler Beach and have been enjoyed by residents for decades at one time or another.

Additionally, Vern Shank has committed to offer his services to oversee these 4th of July events for the City. Vern's current involvement in renewed First Friday celebrations is a natural platform for his role in organizing and staffing the events that the Committee recommends.

Finally, it is the view of the Committee that the use of Veterans Park and the downtown area for these events is an important alternative for families and individuals who seek 4th of July entertainment but are unwilling or unable to visit the beach on what is historically the busiest beach day of the year.

Fireworks Display

From the outset of and even before the Committee's formation, the subject of the 4th of July Fireworks Display has been studied and discussed. There are strong opinions for continuing with the Fireworks Display. There are also many who are indifferent, primarily because of the logistical issues associated with the 4th of July, which are all exacerbated by the high-volume crowds coming for the evening Fireworks Display. Not to be forgotten are those who are not in favor of fireworks at all, with this group consisting primarily of pet owners and others concerned with problems associated with the high-volume traffic of 4th of July evening. All of these points of view have been considered by the Committee in making its recommendations.

The Committee first considered the possibility of sharing this event with the City of Palm Coast, in order to ease traffic and crowd congestion while maintaining the quality of the event. That option was generally deemed not workable due to the demands it would place on law enforcement and on parking and traffic logistics. Accordingly, the conversation turned to conduct of the event by Flagler Beach, only.

In our review of the multifaceted challenges surrounding the conduct of the 4th of July Fireworks Display, the Committee is keenly aware that dispensing with that event would significantly reduce the other challenges discussed in this report,

namely traffic congestion, parking issues and related safety issues. On the other hand, with the Fireworks Celebration being the centerpiece of the day's events and given its general popularity with our residents and our guests, the Committee feels strongly that our recommendations concerning traffic, parking and safety must be implemented to some degree.

It is the desire and hope of the Committee that our recommendations concerning traffic, parking and safety will be implemented by the Commission, which we believe will make the Fireworks Display more appealing and a safer and more enjoyable experience to those who have concerns about those challenges.

Costs to the City of Flagler Beach

Insert narrative:

Historical costs, both in dollars in in kind contributions, have been compiled by Chief Doughney and by City Manager Whitson.

Addendum of cost report by Chief Doughney

Addendum of cost report by C.M. Whitson.

2023 and Beyond

Pier reconstruction is currently scheduled to begin in January 2023, with target completion being late 2025 or early 2026. Accordingly, the shape of Downtown Flagler Beach will change in many respects. From the standpoint of the 4th of July, the platform for the Fireworks Display will not be available.

But this does not necessarily mean the end of Fireworks. Rather, the Committee discussed possible options for the evening of July 4th events during Pier reconstruction. While these options will need to be examined in detail after successful staging of the 2022 4th of July Celebration, the Committee notes the following options for the evening event, during the period of time the Pier is unavailable:

- I. Use of a barge for fireworks in the area of the Pier;
- II. Use of a barge for fireworks in the ICW in the area of the Pier;
- III. Light show and/or presentation by Drone technology.

The Committee recommends that the Committee give consideration to these alternatives to evening 4th of July entertainment during the years the Pier is under construction.