

Pinellas County



Minutes - Final

Thursday, March 19, 2020

2:00 P.M.

Emergency Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Meeting

BCC Assembly Room

Board of County Commissioners

Pat Gerard, Chair

Dave Eggers, Vice-Chair

Charlie Justice

Janet C. Long

Kathleen Peters

Karen Williams Seel

Kenneth T. Welch

ROLL CALL - 2:00 P.M.

Present: 7 - Chair Pat Gerard, Vice-Chair Dave Eggers, Charlie Justice, Janet C. Long, Kathleen Peters, Karen Williams Seel, and Kenneth T. Welch

Others Present: Barry A. Burton, County Administrator; Jewel White, County Attorney; Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller; and Amelia Hanks, Board Reporter.

1. Emergency BCC Meeting

Chair Gerard called the meeting to order; whereupon, Mr. Burton provided an update on actions and closures related to the current Local State of Emergency, noting that Pinellas County Government has implemented new procedures in response to the crisis and taken various measures to help reduce the number of COVID-19 cases in the county.

Sheriff Bob Gualtieri provided an update and played a video showing recent views of Pinellas County beaches. He indicated that previous concerns regarding overcrowded beaches occurred prior to the Governor's Executive Order, and discussed the challenges of enforcing regulations along the beaches; whereupon, he highlighted footage of citizens adhering to social distancing guidelines and responded to queries by the members, indicating that he did not believe the beaches should be closed at this time.

Discussion ensued, and the members shared their concerns regarding the situation and acknowledged the need for closures, relating that a high number of calls have been received from concerned citizens.

Florida Department of Health (DOH) in Pinellas County Director Ulyee Choe provided an update on the evolving situation related to the Coronavirus. Responding to queries by the members, he discussed testing capabilities and criteria, the number and origin of known cases, and the ages of those infected; whereupon, he advised citizens to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

In response to query by Commissioner Long, Dr. Choe indicated that the shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is of great concern; that a healthcare workgroup has been established to monitor the need for additional PPE and to provide information pertaining to appropriating State supplies; and that it is working closely with health care providers to get the equipment to where it is needed. Pinellas County Emergency Management Director Catherine Perkins provided information regarding the County and State responses to the virus and the availability of supplies at both the state and national levels, and discussion ensued.

Responding to queries by Commissioner Welch, Ms. Perkins discussed the processes in place to support local hospitals in preparation for an increase of cases, and Mr. Burton provided an update on the individual actions taken by municipalities to adhere to social distancing guidelines and the need to shut down shopping malls.

Responding to queries by the members, Sheriff Gualtieri related that deputies are obligated to serve a judge's order in evictions and other cases; and that when an order involves a tenant under quarantine, he will ask the judge to delay the eviction.

In response to query by Commissioner Justice regarding extending the Local State of Emergency (LSE), Attorney White related that if there is a lack of a quorum, a County ordinance provides a succession of individuals authorized to continue an LSE starting with the BCC Chair, the Vice-Chair, and then the County Administrator. She indicated that an alternate resolution has been prepared that takes into account the list of succession and if adopted, would allow extension of the LSE while remaining in compliance with CDC guidelines, and discussion ensued regarding State requirements and the difference between the County's response to hurricane events and the current situation.

Responding to queries by the members regarding private and public beaches, Sheriff Gualtieri indicated that he cannot effectively enforce restrictions on private beaches; that his office has adequate supplies of PPE for his deputies; and that the County Jail remains closed to the public.

Mr. Burton related that public hearings must continue to take place by law; that his staff is working on a technological solution to hold meetings online; and that the Appointing Authorities are responsible for the decision to have employees work from home. Attorney White provided input, and discussion ensued regarding the continuation of critical County services.

Responding to the Chair's call for public comment, David Ballard Geddis, Jr., Palm Harbor, and Robert Geller, Redington Beach, appeared and expressed their concerns.

Mr. Burton provided his professional opinion regarding closing of the beaches; whereupon, Commissioner Justice moved that County parking lots along the beaches be closed and public beach access be limited, and Commissioner Long seconded the motion.

Following discussion regarding enforceable requirements, Commissioner Justice withdrew his motion; whereupon, Commissioner Seel moved that the County close public beach parking lots and all public beaches, and Commissioner Welch seconded the motion. Commissioner Eggers suggested that staff urge the State to close Honeymoon and Caladesi Islands, and Commissioner Seel amended her motion accordingly.

Discussion ensued, and Mr. Burton related that shelters at public parks have been closed and events canceled; and that all public parks are being regularly cleaned; whereupon, in response to queries by the members, Attorney White suggested that the beaches be closed for two weeks. Commissioner Welch suggested that the closure should go into effect starting Friday, March 20, at 11:59 P.M., and Commissioner Seel amended her motion to include both suggestions.

A motion was made by Commissioner Seel, seconded by Commissioner Welch, that Pinellas County close public beaches and public beach parking for two weeks and encourage the State to close Honeymoon Island and Caladesi Island State Parks. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Chair Gerard, Vice-Chair Eggers, Commissioner Justice, Commissioner Long, Commissioner Peters, Commissioner Seel, and Commissioner Welch

Resolution No. 20-17 adopted closing the public beaches and public beach parking in Pinellas County, asking the State to close Honeymoon Island and Caladesi Island State Parks, and encouraging the following of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on private beaches, for the two week period beginning March 20, 2020 at 11:59 P.M.

Responding to query by Attorney White, Commissioner Seel stated that she did not want the Board to defer to the Chair in emergency situations at this time, and the members concurred; whereupon, she asked that the County encourage the public to voluntarily shelter in place.

Following discussion, Attorney White asked the Commissioners to authorize her office to work with the County Administrator to draft a resolution that properly reflects the decisions of the Board.

A motion was made by Commissioner Welch, seconded by Commissioner Long, that staff draft a resolution incorporating the items as discussed. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Chair Gerard, Vice-Chair Eggers, Commissioner Justice, Commissioner Long, Commissioner Peters, Commissioner Seel, and Commissioner Welch

Thereupon, the Chair called for a motion to extend the Local State of Emergency.

A motion was made by Commissioner Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Seel, that the Local State of Emergency be extended for seven days. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Chair Gerard, Vice-Chair Eggers, Commissioner Justice, Commissioner Long, Commissioner Peters, Commissioner Seel, and Commissioner Welch

Resolution No. 20-18 adopted extending the Local State of Emergency established in Resolution 20-16, as extended, as well as all orders issued pursuant thereto, as of 3:00 P.M. March 19, 2020, as provided in Section 252.38(3)(a)5, Florida Statutes, for seven days.

Chair Gerard asked that the Commissioners temporarily shut down their public offices, and discussion ensued.

ADJOURNMENT - 4:39 P.M.

ATTEST: KEN BURKE, CLERK

Chair

By _____
Deputy Clerk