

MCDEC Meeting Minutes, September 2020

Here are the minutes from the September meeting of MCDEC. Our next meeting will be held October 20th at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Hank Bonner
Secretary/Treasurer MCDEC

Call to Order: Carol Ann called the September 15th meeting to order at 6:30.

Members and Guests Present: Carol Ann Leonard, Jon Page, Sam Hay, Ginny Sherlock, Bridgit Kirouac, Hank Bonner, Ben Lovelace, Dave Cross, Corinna Robinson, Elisa Ackerly, Merritt Matheson

General Announcements: Carol Ann reminded Caucus of the following: a) Poll workers needed. Contact Jon Page if interested. b) Vote-by-Mail ballots will be mailed Sept 24–Oct 1. c) Last day to register is Oct 5th. d) Early voting Oct 19-31. Be sure to drop off your ballot at an early voting site or mail your mail-in-ballot early – at least a week before the election. Be sure your signature matches. Go to <https://www.martinvotes.com/> for more info.

Minutes: Minutes from July meeting were approved.

Treasurer Report: Current balance is \$460.

Guest Speaker Merritt Matheson: Merritt recently won reelection as City of Stuart Commissioner and has been an outspoken advocate of the environment, which is one of the primary reasons he first ran for office in 2018. He grew up in Martin County and has spent most of his life here fishing and being on the water. Merritt's talk focused primarily on two areas: a) environmental matters the City of Stuart has addressed or will be addressing and b) topics related to growth.

Some of the environmental issues Merritt spoke about:

- the glyphosate ban enacted in 2018
- the City's support of Dr. Grant Gilmore's efforts to get a dozen fish species that live and breed only in the Loxahatchee, St. Lucie, and St. Sebastian rivers to be put on the endangered species list. If this is achieved, then that will help in our efforts to keep the rivers clean.
- the plastic straw ban initially passed in Oct 2019 and which will go into full effect in 2021 (medical, dental, and nursing homes/assisted-living facilities are exempt). See the handouts Carol Ann forwarded prior to the meeting for details on the ordinance. Merritt pointed out that the ultimate aim is to reduce plastic waste. Currently, food establishments within the city are supposed to ask inside diners if they want a straw, but drive-thru restaurants thus far have been able to automatically give customers a plastic straw without asking....Starting in January 2021, restaurants must continue to ask dine-in customers if they want a straw and, if yes, only provide recyclable straws, and drive-thru restaurants must only give out recyclable straws. Food establishments can be fined for violating this ordinance. Surprisingly, Merritt noted that he had not gotten too much push back on this.
- the creation of a full-time River Advocate as part of city staff
- under consideration is the establishment of Riverwalk "offshoots" or extensions that allow for environmental lessons

- working with the county to further the development of living shorelines whereby trees, shrubs, rock, sand/gravel beds, and oyster beds act as natural filters for lowering nitrogen and phosphorus in water, encouraging mangrove development, and providing habitat for wildlife. Using the living shoreline model is a safe, natural way to improve water quality along the river and the city is encouraging this approach.

Merritt also discussed growth. On one hand, growth can increase the tax base, it can in some cases add jobs, it can provide lower-cost housing, and by allowing growth within the city it may help prevent urban sprawl in rural areas of the county. On the flip side, it can take away from our open land, trees, and wildlife, it can increase congestion and pollution, and it can for some people make the city a less desirable place to live. Another point Merritt made was that the city cannot tell a property owner what to build and so sometimes something is built that many people, including the commissioners, do not really like but the city has little power to force change if the business or development meets the guidelines. Merritt acknowledged the issue of growth is very troublesome for him at times because of these conflicting ideas, especially if growth appears to harm the environment. He tries to look at each situation objectively and consider all aspects when deciding how to vote on a growth issue. He spoke about the Stuart Springtree and Bridgeview developments as illustrations of how these competing forces are considered in his decision making and how sometimes saying yes to a development is something he has to do.

As was noted by Caucus members, it was refreshing to see an elected official so well-informed on the issues (including environmental), so thoughtful and deliberate in the way he approaches his work as commissioner, and so well spoken on the issues that affect Stuart.

Rivers Coalition Update: Next meeting is on September 24th. Carol Ann will send out info on that.

Old Business/New Business: Vote and GOTV! Help local candidates by donating time and money.

Meeting Concluded: Meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.