

## **Boater Safety and Bay Education Task Force Meeting**

**Date: March 12, 2026 - 1:00 PM**

Department of Environmental Resources Management

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### **1. WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE**

Chairman, Andy Fernandez recapped the past several months and meetings. He highlighted that the Task Force has examined the issues surrounding boater safety and responsible use of our waterways through the four pillars: education, enforcement, legislation, and waterway management.

The Chair explained the objective of this meeting is to review the recommendations under each of the four pillars, prioritize them by impact, and distinguish between those that can be achieved in the short term and those requiring a longer-term approach. He explained that members have been assigned to specific pillars and will submit their recommendations in a standardized format to ensure consistency in the final report, which will be organized and prepared for submission to the Mayor. He emphasized that the meeting would serve as a working session without formal presentations, while still allowing time for public comment. Chairman Fernandez also expressed appreciation for the members' contributions, underscoring that their work is essential to advancing meaningful safety measures and protecting local waterways, ultimately with the goal of saving lives.

He also recognized notable attendees, including State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and representatives from the State Attorney's Office.

### **2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA – Actionable Item**

Chair Andy Fernandez called for approval of the agenda. Agenda approved unanimously.

### **3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Actionable Item**

Chair Andy Fernandez called for approval of the Minutes from the February 19 meeting. Minutes approved unanimously.

### **4. REPORT DISCUSSION**

Chairman Fernandez explained that this meeting marks the first of two working sessions focused on building consensus around the task force's findings and recommendations before finalizing the report. He noted that a compiled list of recommendations from prior meetings had been shared. Members were asked to identify their top recommendations for each pillar to help prioritize by impact and determine which initiatives are feasible in the short term versus the long term. He emphasized that the session is intended to narrow and clarify the list to ensure a strong, unified set of recommendations. He added that members will further refine their assigned sections and supporting narratives after the meeting and submit them via email to Katie and Nancy using a standardized template provided by staff.

Chairman Fernandez explained the way the pillars were broken up:

- Education - Nick Estrella and Andy Fernandez
- Law Enforcement – State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and Larry Berryman
- Legislation – Taylor White and Mike Simpson

- Waterway Management – Captain Glenn Clyatt and Aabad Melwani

Nancy Jackson, DERM, explained that, in accordance with Sunshine requirements, discussions among task force members must take place during publicly noticed meetings, including today's session and the March 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. Members were instructed to submit their recommendations and any supporting narrative individually to staff, who will compile all inputs into a draft report organized by the four pillars. This draft will be shared with members and posted publicly in advance of the next meeting to ensure transparency. Members will then review the document independently and provide feedback, with all collective discussion and refinement occurring at the final meeting. Ms. Jackson also noted that any overlapping or duplicative recommendations will be consolidated as part of the drafting process.

Chairman Fernandez acknowledged the effort involved in reconciling the task force's work. He explained that all recommendations, along with any supporting comments or narratives, should be submitted to staff in advance of the final meeting so that the group can use that session as a final working meeting to resolve outstanding issues and reach consensus. He noted that, while the process may feel unconventional, it is structured to allow staff to finalize the report efficiently after the meeting, and he expressed confidence that the approach will be successful.

*Recommendation: Permanent Advisory Board*

- Chairman Fernandez proposed that the task force consider recommending the creation of a permanent advisory board. He expressed strong support for this idea, emphasizing that the issue is both highly important and continuously evolving, making it difficult to fully address within the limited timeframe of a temporary task force. He noted that a permanent board would provide ongoing oversight, continuity through administrative changes, accountability, and a dedicated forum for communication and discussion. He invited feedback from members on whether there is consensus to include this recommendation and offered to take the lead in drafting the supporting narrative.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle expressed support of this recommendation. She emphasized that meaningful and lasting change will require a sustained, long-term effort that extends beyond the life of the task force. She noted that many of the issues such as improving awareness, advancing education, reforming investigations, and pursuing legislative changes, take years to develop and implement effectively. She added that the scope of potential reforms, including legal structures, court processes, and funding needs, is significant and complex. For these reasons, she reiterated her belief that establishing a permanent advisory board is essential to ensure continuous focus, coordination, and progress on these critical issues.
- Aabad Melwani emphasized that boating, waterway, and ocean safety are fundamental to the community's way of life, affecting not only government and industry stakeholders but all residents who benefit from access to the waterways. He stressed the need for ongoing oversight to monitor progress and ensure accountability, noting that as the population grows, and waterway usage increases, these issues will only become more critical. He expressed support for establishing a permanent advisory board with a structured succession plan to provide continuous governance, encourage community involvement, and create a consistent forum for public input alongside government and law enforcement efforts.
- Nancy Jackson explained that a permanent advisory board would provide a more structured, ongoing framework compared to a temporary task force, but noted that it must be approved by the Board of County Commissioners and cannot be created by the Mayor alone. She clarified that such a board would serve in an advisory role rather than

having legislative authority, though it could still influence policy through collaboration with commissioners and act as a conduit for advancing recommendations.

- Mike Simpson supported the idea, emphasizing that a permanent board would create the right platform for productive and sometimes challenging conversations. He noted that many organizations are working toward similar safety goals but lack coordination, and a standing body could help unify those efforts, stay ahead of emerging issues, and maintain momentum toward improving safety.
- Nick Estrella stated that there is a clear gap in this space, with no existing organization fully addressing these issues.
- Captain Glenn Clyatt agreed, stressing that if this group does not take on the responsibility, no one else will. He highlighted the increasing challenges on the waterways and the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to achieve the shared goal of safety.
- Chairman Fernandez volunteered to draft the recommendation for inclusion in the final report, and then transitioned the discussion toward prioritizing recommendations under the first pillar, beginning with boater education.

### Pillar 1: Boater Education

Recommendation: Require Boater ID card for rentals at County operated Marinas; conduct research to ensure local government ability to implement.

### High Priority, High Importance

- Nick emphasized that the task force should prioritize requiring anyone using county-managed assets such as marinas and docks, to be certified in boating safety. He explained that this approach targets the users most in need of education, since private boat owners typically already have the necessary skills. By leveraging county assets to enforce this certification requirement, he believes the task force can create a meaningful barrier that improves safety and focuses efforts where they will have the greatest impact.
- Chairman Fernandez agreed that requiring the boater ID card is a high-impact, high-priority recommendation. He noted that while it may involve legal complexities, the task force should still highlight it as a top recommendation and could suggest that the county conduct a study to ensure local authority allows implementation.
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Recommendation: Expanded public awareness campaign at County facilities

- Mike Simpson agreed, adding that many of the other recommendations overlap and could be integrated creatively into this approach. He suggested using county facilities to reinforce safety through education, signage, QR codes linking to safety videos, and other engagement methods. He argued that making certification mandatory is a straightforward, high-value step that would naturally support several other safety initiatives. He also discussed doing awareness at the boat ramps and how the safest thing on the boat is where everyone else is aware.
- Chairman Fernandez explains that beyond requiring boaters to demonstrate basic proficiency when renting slips or using ramps, the task force should recommend a broader public awareness campaign focused on boater safety. He suggests placing educational materials at boat ramps, marinas, and even the airport, emphasizing that messaging should target both captains and passengers. Drawing parallels to existing campaigns, such as those promoting life jacket use and learning to swim, he argues that

boater safety deserves similar visibility, especially during busy weekends or through targeted engagement days.

- Aabad Melwani agreed.
- Chairman Fernandez suggested making boater-safety information easy to access, such as placing QR codes at ramps that link to short videos, so the message is visible in public spaces rather than hidden in paperwork.
- Glenn Clyatt explains that engaging people at the boat ramp is far more effective because officers or volunteers can reach multiple groups at once through natural foot traffic. He adds that creating designated lanes could help, with one lane for boaters who are open to receiving safety guidance, ensuring that those willing to listen get meaningful interaction without being rushed by others.
- Chairman Fernandez liked the idea of having a specific lane for new boat owners at boat ramps.
- Mike Simpson noted that many boaters already use an app that shows ramp status and wait times, and he wondered how much reach it has. He added that common spots at ramps, like fillet tables, garbage cans, and bathrooms, offer great opportunities for eye-catching, engaging safety messages rather than the usual dull signs.
- Chairman Fernandez said he liked the idea and felt it had almost unlimited potential, even opening the door to sponsorships. He noted that boaters were already a captive audience because they had permits or paid fees, and the campaign should reach them from the moment they arrived. He added that at places like Matheson, the exposure should begin right at the entrance booth so visitors heading to the restaurant, beach, or anywhere else would immediately encounter the campaign's messaging.
- Chairman Fernandez noted that Tommy had held periodic Saturday education sessions at boat ramps during high-traffic months. He explained that this fit well with the task force's broader recommendation to expand public awareness campaigns, including targeted education at county facilities, airports, and other places where the county controls signage. He added that existing campaigns already had funding attached, so it made sense to piggyback new boater-safety messaging onto them to increase reach and impact.
- Glenn Clyatt said that educating people as they waited at the ramp made sense because no one was in a rush during that period. While the captain retrieved the car, the rest of the group was essentially a captive audience, giving officers or volunteers a perfect opportunity to demonstrate simple safety basics like how to put on a life jacket. He emphasized that this downtime created a natural moment for effective outreach.
- Nick Estrella said these ideas were valuable but required personnel, which was already in short supply. He explained that during busy events like Columbus Day Regatta weekend, volunteers had seen how hectic ramps could get, making on-the-ground education difficult. He suggested that the most effective and realistic step was to require anyone using county ramps to show proof of boater-ID certification before accessing the facilities. He emphasized that while additional education was helpful, the priority should be ensuring the captain, the person ultimately responsible, was certified, since everyone else on the boat depended on that individual's competence.

*Recommendation: Explore public-private partnerships for awareness campaign*

- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle wondered whether private-sector partners could be brought into the effort, noting that hotels, restaurants with docks, and other waterfront businesses might be willing to support or promote boater-safety messaging. She explained that these places had strong influence over both locals and tourists, and

that partnering with them could expand the reach of the campaign. She added that with the county, the schools, and the mayor already engaged, tapping into private-sector interest could make the overall effort even more powerful.

- Chairman Fernandez said he fully agreed with the State Attorney and believed the task force should recommend that the mayor explore public-private partnerships. He explained that meaningful progress would likely require collaboration with outside organizations, including organizations like the Monica Bruguera Foundation and the Lucy Fernandez Foundation, which could help distribute training materials. He added that businesses such as restaurants, bait-and-tackle shops, and other places frequented by boaters could also participate by sharing safety messaging. While the county could not force private companies to join, he said the mayor's office could approach them to build a cooperative awareness campaign, noting that public-private partnerships had become an increasingly important part of boater safety efforts.
- Mike Simpson believed major life-saving brands might be interested in sponsoring safety messaging at marinas, especially if they could place marketing displays in high-traffic areas. He noted that companies that make life jackets, for example, might welcome the exposure, which could help cover costs while still promoting safety. He added that if done properly through the required processes, this kind of partnership could become a win for both safety efforts and the businesses involved.
- Chairman Fernandez said that while decisions about allowing vendors or sponsors on county property were beyond the group's authority, they could still recommend exploring the idea. He added that the task force should focus on recommendations that were both high-impact and low-cost, noting that requiring proof of certification for slip rentals or facility use would be inexpensive and relatively quick to implement if legally feasible. He also emphasized that expanding the public-awareness campaign would take longer but was too important to abandon, since education remained essential to improving safety.

#### *Pillar 1: Boater Education – Distribution of work*

- Chairman Fernandez said he wanted Nick to take the lead on developing recommendations for how the county could better use its own assets, while he would draft the section on the public-awareness campaign so they could merge their ideas before the next meeting. He added that he would also include language about exploring public-private partnerships, noting that the State Attorney's suggestion was an important addition to their recommendations.

#### *Pillar 2: Law Enforcement*

##### *Recommendation: Improving Interagency Coordination*

- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said she felt a bit guilty for missing earlier meetings but emphasized that even from her limited exposure, improving interagency coordination was clearly necessary. She noted that weekend coordination should be part of that effort. She added that her office could do a better job meeting regularly with law-enforcement partners to review responsibilities, identify gaps, and develop consistent, targeted approaches especially for weekends and known hotspots. She stressed that this needed to be ongoing rather than occasional. She also highlighted the importance of data collection, explaining that evidence-based decision-making was essential for shaping policy, evaluating what worked, and even considering ideas like a dedicated civil-citation track or specialized court processes. She pointed out that they

didn't yet know basic information, such as how many civil citations existed, and that understanding those details would be crucial before designing any system.

- Mike Simpson said he believed that reliable data was absolutely essential and that he had been surprised to learn agencies were using two different ticketing systems, including paper tickets. He explained that this made the information unreliable and difficult to trust, which in turn made it nearly impossible to evaluate problems or make informed decisions. He stressed that having a unified, accurate system for collecting data should be one of the strongest recommendations, because without trustworthy information, no meaningful improvements could be made.

*Recommendation: Land based Enforcement - County Business Tax Receipt Process and Enforcement*

*Low Cost*

- Mike Simpson said that item three was especially important to him because he had been deeply involved in the issue of illegal charters for years. He explained that long before the Miami Vice tragedy, he had tried to raise concerns at Coast Guard meetings but had been dismissed until the fatal incident finally forced people to pay attention. He stressed that the county already had low-cost tools available particularly the Business Tax Receipt (BTR) system but they were not being used effectively. He pointed out that DERM issued MOPs for marinas but did not regulate residential properties, which allowed entire strips of homes to operate illegal charters daily despite repeated reports to multiple municipalities. He said these operations were openly advertised on social media, yet no agency stepped in, and the burden kept falling on police and marine patrol even though the problem should have been stopped at the land-use level. He added that BTRs were being issued to jet-ski operators using residential addresses, such as homes in Kendall, which should never have been approved. He argued that the county needed to take a hard look at the BTR process, clarify which departments were responsible for enforcement, and ensure that existing rules were actually being applied. Doing so would reduce illegal operators on the water, free up officers for real safety issues, and prevent problems before they reached the marine environment. Simpson said this was a low-cost, high-impact fix because the processes already existed, they simply were not being enforced. He also reiterated his concern about the ticketing systems, saying he could not understand why agencies were not using a unified system, which made accurate data collection impossible.
- Chairman Fernandez gave the State Attorney some context about the earlier discussions on land-based enforcement. He explained that while Mike had long advocated for it, Marine Patrol units from Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami had also told the task force that land-based support would significantly help them. Those officers said that if code enforcement and land-use teams handled issues like illegal operations at the source, it would free marine officers to focus on safety and enforcement on the water. Fernandez emphasized that this was a high-impact, low-cost change that simply required reallocating responsibilities.

*Recommendation: One ticketing system and one radio frequency used for all law enforcement agencies*

- Chairman Fernandez added that another surprising issue raised in previous meetings was that every agency—Miami-Dade, City of Miami, Miami Beach, and FWC—used different ticketing systems. Officers had described it as a nightmare because they had

no way of knowing whether someone had been stopped multiple times by another agency. Although an initiative was underway to unify the systems, he said the task force should formally recommend that it be completed, since the current setup created major inefficiencies.

- Fernandez also noted that agencies were operating on different radio frequencies, meaning they could not communicate directly during incidents. Officers had told the group that they relied on WhatsApp group chats to coordinate, even during emergencies. He said that was unacceptable and that the task force should recommend moving all marine-enforcement units onto a shared communication frequency.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said that the issues raised about competing databases, inconsistent citation systems, and unclear reporting pathways all underscored the need for a unified approach. She explained that these problems should be incorporated into the broader recommendation to improve interagency coordination, because they were natural consequences of fragmented enforcement structures. She said the task force should examine how BTRs were enforced, how citations were issued, where they were sent, who collected the information, and which entity was responsible for analyzing it. She emphasized that the county needed uniform protocols for reporting, citation processes, and data collection so the task force could clearly understand what was happening and identify gaps. She suggested that instead of treating these issues separately, they could be combined into one cohesive plan focused on improving overall enforcement—something that would inherently require better coordination among agencies. She added that land-based enforcement fit into this same framework, since it was also fundamentally an enforcement issue.
- Aabad Melwani noted that a unified citation system would only be effective if violations carried real consequences. He explained that, unlike traffic tickets, boating citations currently don't affect insurance rates, which means they have little deterrent value. If all agencies used the same software and the data fed into insurance systems, unsafe boaters would face financial penalties, creating meaningful behavior change without requiring more officers or boats. He described this as a cost-effective, "subtle" form of enforcement driven by backend systems rather than increased on water resources.
- Nick Estrella said that limited on-water enforcement remained a major obstacle, and he had been thinking about how to make existing officers more efficient. He suggested exploring cameras on channel markers as a form of remote surveillance to identify high-traffic or high-risk areas, allowing agencies to deploy their few marine units more strategically. He said the idea came from reviewing the draft recommendations and thinking about how better coordination and data could support smarter enforcement.
- Chairman Fernandez liked Nick's idea, noting it fell into the "high-impact, high-cost" category but was still worth exploring. He suggested it could fit within the data-collection recommendations, helping identify hotspots and guide resource deployment. He added that the community often proposes creative ideas like speed-alert signs used on roads and imagined similar technology on markers that could flash warnings to boaters. While implementation and funding would be challenges, he said concepts like cameras or alert systems could meaningfully influence behavior, just as roadside speed displays do for drivers.
- Nick Estrella said that even the perception of being watched can change behavior, just like when drivers slow down after seeing a parked police car. He suggested that cameras or even signs on markers indicating monitoring could create that same deterrent effect on the water. He noted that this approach could influence boater behavior without requiring additional officers, making it a high-impact option despite the cost.

- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle thought the idea was very clever and aligned with the kinds of technologies her office already works with. She noted that while it might be a big undertaking, there are existing tools like ShotSpotter for gunfire that could have water-based equivalents. She said options could range from cameras to flashing signs in hotspots, and that it was worth exploring what data already exists on speeding and unsafe behavior. She supported including this concept as something to study further.
- Chairman Andy agreed the idea had clear high-impact potential because it would prompt immediate behavior changes on the water. The challenge, he noted, would be implementation and cost, but he believed it should still be included as a recommendation. He suggested placing it under data collection and analysis so the county could explore how to move toward such technology in the future.

Recommendation: Creative enforcement

- Mike Simpson said that installing cameras or signs on markers would first require restoring many navigation markers themselves, since some areas don't even have structures to mount equipment on. He suggested that ideas like this could be handled by a permanent advisory board, which could take on long-term projects. He noted that while cameras were promising, the harsh marine environment—salt air, rough conditions, and wildlife—made them difficult to maintain. He pointed to a recent presentation showing technology that could integrate speed zones, hazards, and congestion data directly into boating electronics. He said pushing manufacturers like Garmin to adopt these tools might be easier and more effective, since it would reach far more boaters and provide real-time alerts similar to traffic maps on the road.
- Chairman Andy agreed with Mike's points and noted that Garmin's presentation showed how technology could play a major role in improving boater behavior. He said integrating alerts and safety information directly into onboard electronics could create immediate course-correction without relying solely on officers. He supported incorporating this into the recommendations and using it to reinforce the need for a permanent advisory board, since these long-term tech solutions will take time to develop. He then shifted back to the draft recommendations, noting they still needed to address increased law-enforcement presence during peak boating weekends, especially at crowded ramps and marinas.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said the idea of increasing law-enforcement presence during peak boating times fit naturally under the broader coordination recommendation. She explained that identifying holiday hotspots, planning ahead, and determining which agencies handle what responsibilities all fall under improved interagency coordination. She supported placing this concept within that framework so agencies could better plan and deploy resources throughout the year.
- Mike Simpson said that one low-cost option could be using decoy police boats with solar-powered blue lights during peak weekends. He noted that similar setups are already used on land, where parked police cars with flashing lights prompt drivers to slow down. Even if only a fraction of boaters changed their behavior out of caution or fear of enforcement, he said it would still have a meaningful safety impact.
- Chairman Fernandez said that even simple, low-cost visibility measures could influence boater behavior. He gave the example of parking a Miami-Dade police car labeled "BUI Task Force" at a boat ramp on a busy Saturday. Just seeing it, he said, would make captains think twice and adjust their behavior before heading back in. He emphasized

that this kind of presence-based deterrence requires minimal resources but can have an immediate safety impact.

- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle agreed the idea worked on the same principle as police take-home cars - visible presence changes behavior. She suggested asking law-enforcement partners to park a marked vehicle, even with just a placard, at ramps on busy weekends to create that deterrent effect.
- Chairman Andy agreed and said the concept was strong, low-cost, and something the group could collectively support, noting the next steps would fall to her to explore with the agencies.

### Pillar 3: Legislative

Recommendation: *Include in the County's legislative priorities boater and watercraft safety and illegal charters*

- Abad Melwani said the task force's broader theme should include supporting legislation, especially the effort to formalize the group into a permanent advisory committee. He noted that while the board can't pass laws itself, it is well-positioned to guide legislation because its members live these issues daily and work closely with agencies, civic leaders, and industry. He said his two priorities for lawmakers would be funding and enforcement: securing more financial resources from federal, state, or private sources, and strengthening both land-based enforcement and deterrence-based tools like a uniform citation system tied to insurance and actuarial data.
- Chairman Fernandez said the legislative section was challenging because many of the ideas discussed like tougher BUI penalties or linking boating violations to driver's licenses require state-level action beyond the task force's authority. He said the group should focus on what can realistically be recommended at the local level. He suggested that one viable local option might be creating specialized courts or magistrates for boating-related cases, similar to past models like drug court. He asked the State Attorney whether that concept could fit under the legislative recommendations.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle explained specialized courts or hearing tracks for boating cases were worth exploring and could fit under the broader enforcement framework. She explained that while creating a formal court would be costly and complex, there are lighter-weight options, such as dedicated calendars, magistrates, or administrative hearing officers, that could still provide consistency and highlight gaps in the system. She noted that Key West doesn't have a true boating court, just a single point of contact, but that model shows the value of continuity. She emphasized the need for better data to understand case volume before designing any structure. She also agreed that some reforms, like tougher penalties, linking violations to driver's licenses, or insurance consequences, require state legislation, but urged the advisory board not to abandon them. Legislative change often takes sustained advocacy, she said, and the county's strong lobbying team could help make these reforms a priority in Tallahassee.
- Chairman Fernandez said he liked the idea because it gives the task force a clear, actionable recommendation: asking the county to include boating and watercraft-safety reforms in its official legislative priorities. He noted that this would allow the county's lobbying team to actively advocate for these issues in Tallahassee.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle asked for clarification about a section labeled "enforcement, administration" under the legislative recommendations, noting it wasn't clear whether those items were meant to be county-level or state-level actions.

She pointed out that many of the issues listed in that section appeared to fall under state authority, reinforcing the earlier point that the task force must distinguish between what can be done locally and what requires state legislation.

*Recommendation: Review County marina agreement termination clauses to enforce removal of unauthorized commercial activity from County marinas.*

- Chairman Fernandez said the task force could make a concrete legislative recommendation by asking the county to include boater safety and illegal charter issues in its formal legislative priorities. He added another idea from earlier discussions: reviewing county marina-use contracts to determine whether they allow termination when a slip holder is found to be operating illegally or using the space for unauthorized commercial activity. He noted that in many agreements, termination clauses are weak or nonexistent, which makes it difficult to remove bad actors even when wrongdoing is clear. He suggested recommending a legal review to identify whether stronger provisions could be added.
- Aabad explained that during COVID, when marina activity became difficult to control, his organization began strictly enforcing a clause in their dockage and storage agreements that allows termination with 30 days' notice for any reason or no reason at all. He noted that many private marinas have similar provisions. He suggested the county should review its own marina-use agreements to see whether such a clause exists, and if not, it would be simple to add it to future contracts or amend current ones. This would give the county a straightforward tool to remove bad actors using slips for unauthorized commercial activity.
- Andy said the idea of reviewing and amending marina-use agreements is a strong, high-impact, low-cost recommendation, since it simply involves updating contract language. He then shifted to another item he wanted included in the legislative section: the proposal for the county to establish a harbormaster position. He noted that Tommy had previously raised this idea and asked him to explain to the task force what a harbormaster is and why the role would be valuable, suggesting it might fit perfectly within the legislative recommendations.
- Tommy Salleh, said that, as a private citizen, he has long believed it's a major oversight that a county as large and active as Miami-Dade does not have a harbormaster. He explained that a harbormaster typically oversees issues like derelict vessels, managed and unmanaged mooring fields, pump-out programs, and overall water-quality and bay-management concerns. In many places the role sits within law enforcement, though it can also be a hybrid regulatory position. He emphasized that in other major coastal regions—especially in the Northeast—harbormasters are essential, and creating such a position in Miami-Dade has been a long-standing and personally important goal for him.
- Andy thanked Tommy for the explanation and said the harbormaster concept is something the task force could realistically include in its recommendations. He noted that Tommy has been an active participant from the beginning and clearly believes this role would help address many of the issues the task force has identified. Andy suggested the idea fits well within the legislative section as a meaningful, actionable proposal.
- Tommy added that the county really needs a single point person or agency to coordinate all the different responsibilities spread across multiple departments. While the various agencies do a decent job individually, he said a dedicated harbormaster would provide unified oversight and streamline communication and management across the board.

- Mike Simpson said establishing a harbormaster is an obvious and necessary step, but it will require buy-in from all the relevant agencies and municipalities. He noted that while the Port has a Harbor Safety Committee, not all key players consistently participate, which limits its effectiveness. He emphasized that funding remains critical especially for issues like derelict vessels, where existing resources are never enough. He added that the task force could play an important role in shaping long-term solutions, such as exploring mooring fields to reduce derelict vessels and helping coordinate the broader, big-picture planning needed to avoid constantly playing catch-up.

*Recommendation: Pursue alternative funding*

- Andy noted that many of the task force's priorities, like increased enforcement and better coordination, ultimately run into the same obstacle: limited funding. He said the group should formally recommend that the county pursue alternative funding sources. He referenced a presentation from Spencer Crowley about FIND, an organization that provides substantial grant funding for equipment and infrastructure, and suggested the county make a coordinated effort to tap into those kinds of opportunities.
- He then recapped the key local recommendations emerging from the discussion: reviewing and strengthening marina-use contracts, establishing a harbormaster position, seeking alternative funding sources, and adding boating and watercraft safety to the county's legislative priorities. He emphasized that these are all actionable steps the county can take while the task force continues pursuing longer-term state-level reforms.

*Pillar 4: Waterway Management*

*Recommendation: Perform a full audit of navigational channel markers*

- Aabad Melwani said the top waterway-management priorities are restoring navigation markers and standardizing speed-zone signage. He emphasized that Miami-Dade's markers have never been fully restored to pre-Hurricane Andrew levels, more than 30 years later, which he called unacceptable given today's boating traffic and the region's growth. He said a full audit is needed because many channels lack markers entirely, while others are broken, obsolete, or unlit, creating serious safety risks, especially at dawn or dusk. He noted that recent accident data showed a high number of collisions with fixed objects, and he believes many of those incidents likely involve missing or damaged navigational markers. He added that funding is an overarching issue but didn't dwell on it since the need is already well understood.
- Glenn Clyatt agreed with Aabad and shared an example to illustrate how dangerous submerged hazards can be. He recalled an I-beam in Ocean Reef's Hawk Channel that sat just below the surface depending on the tide completely invisible at high tide and remained there for roughly 20 years. He said it was "crazy" that such a hazard could persist for so long, underscoring the urgent need to restore and properly maintain navigation markers.
- Aabad Melwani said the next step is figuring out who actually has jurisdiction over navigation markers, since responsibility varies—sometimes it's the state, sometimes the county, and sometimes the Coast Guard. He suggested that the simplest path forward would be to engage whichever agency controls each area and deploy a coordinated fleet to conduct a full assessment of missing, damaged, or outdated markers.

- Mike Simpson said that responsibility for navigation markers is shared by municipalities, the Coast Guard, and other agencies. He pointed to Miami Beach as an example, where the city funded new markers but coordinated placement with the Coast Guard. He argued that improving markers will require a coordinated “pressure campaign” from all municipalities, because safety can’t be taken seriously if basic navigation aids aren’t even functional like having unlit highway exits. He added that the accident statistics Aabad referenced only reflect reported incidents, and many collisions with markers go unreported due to embarrassment or impairment. That makes the problem even more serious. Mike said restoring markers to baseline, safe conditions shouldn’t even be part of the funding debate, it should be a given. Funding discussions should focus on improvements and ongoing maintenance, but simply bringing the system back up to standard must be treated as an immediate priority. He warned that boaters often rely too heavily on electronics, and when those fail, missing or damaged markers become a major hazard.
- Aabad Melwani noted that many existing markers are labeled “not for navigational purposes,” which he said is absurd given that they effectively become hazards when they’re broken, unlit, or misplaced. He suggested a simple first step: focus on the main boating thoroughfares and have county, state, or Coast Guard vessels run those routes, marking GPS waypoints wherever a marker is missing, damaged, or dark. That baseline survey would create a clear, actionable map of what needs to be repaired or replaced.
- Glenn Clyatt explained that when submerged hazards are discovered, the Coast Guard often “buoys them off” to warn boaters. But this creates its own complications: buoys need a long scope of line so they can swing with wind and tide, which makes it difficult to know the buoy’s exact position relative to the underwater obstruction. He noted that this is a common workaround, but it highlights how challenging and imprecise it can be to manage subsurface hazards without properly removing or replacing the damaged markers.
- Aabad Melwani said that while restoring navigation markers is a long, multi-year effort, it’s essential and can begin with a focused audit of the most heavily used thoroughfares in Biscayne Bay. He noted that many markers currently say “not for navigational purposes,” which makes them essentially hazards when they’re broken or unlit. He suggested starting with a systematic survey—having county, state, or Coast Guard vessels run the main routes and log GPS waypoints wherever markers are missing or damaged. He added that standardized speed-zone signage ties directly into this work. Without reliable physical markers, boaters lack clear information, and some zones don’t even appear on charts. He referenced a January presentation by Albert Gomez, who had extensive expertise on integrating speed-zone and marker data into GPS systems. Aabad suggested inviting him back or involving him more formally so that digital navigation tools can display accurate information while physical markers are being audited and replaced.
- Glenn Clyatt agreed with Aabad and added that many boaters rely entirely on electronics, following the same GPS track line back in because they never learned basic navigation skills. He said this becomes dangerous when electronics fail—low battery, equipment malfunction, or even the captain becoming incapacitated. He emphasized that safe-boating education should reinforce fundamentals like understanding direction, reading the water, and navigating without GPS. He noted that some modern boats are even sold without compasses, which he called “insane,” because it assumes electronics will always work.
- Aabad Melwani said there are multiple ways to tackle the problem, but everything starts with a comprehensive audit of the existing navigation markers. He believes that nearly

all of them likely need replacement or modernization. He emphasized that while the project may take 5–10 years and require significant funding, it's critical for safety and long overdue. Beginning with the most heavily trafficked areas of Biscayne Bay would provide a practical starting point for the larger effort.

- Chairman Fernandez said the navigation-marker restoration effort clearly falls into the “high-impact” category, even though it will likely carry a higher cost than some of the task force’s other recommendations. He added that if full physical replacement is too expensive upfront, the first phase of the audit should at least identify where markers are missing or damaged and ensure those locations appear in digital navigation systems and on physical charts. That way, boaters have accurate information even before the infrastructure is fully rebuilt. Andy agreed that everything begins with the audit and said the group has a solid direction.
- Mike Simpson said the recommendation should stay focused on conducting an audit so the task doesn’t feel overwhelming. He added that the audit itself can serve as an awareness tool, once people see how bad the situation is, it should create motivation. He noted this is a strong long-term project that can run in parallel with other initiatives.
- Aabad Melwani agreed and said the long-term, iterative nature of the navigation-marker work underscores why the task force should become a permanent advisory body. A multi-year project needs continuity.

*Recommendation: Revisit report on North Bay area from 2024 and Mayor order a complete a vessel congestion study*

- Chairman Fernandez then shifted to a related issue the group hadn’t discussed yet. He reminded everyone that in 2024 the mayor ordered a study on whether the North Bay should have year-round boating-restricted areas including no-wake zones or speed limits, due to congestion. The study concluded that increased enforcement would be more effective than new restrictions. But Andy expressed frustration that, two years later, the increased enforcement never materialized, and the accident trends haven’t improved. He explained that the study referenced a vessel congestion study as a formal analysis conducted by a professional maritime firm that would allow the county to legally impose speed limits or restricted areas. Miami-Dade Marine Patrol explicitly stated in the report that they cannot perform such a study themselves and recommended hiring an outside company. That step was never taken. Andy suggested the task force recommend revisiting the 2024 report and formally ordering the vessel congestion study, especially since many speakers have raised concerns about dangerous congestion in the North Bay. Requesting the study is low-cost, and obtaining proposals would at least move the issue forward. He asked the group for their thoughts on including this recommendation.
- Mike Simpson agreed the vessel-congestion study is a “no-brainer,” but noted that enforcement becomes complicated because multiple agencies including municipal marine patrols, the Coast Guard, and the County, overlap in jurisdiction. He pointed to Miami Beach and Fisherman’s Channel as examples where unclear authority has stalled enforcement of no-wake zones. Still, he emphasized that the study can and should move forward regardless of those jurisdictional challenges.
- Chairman Fernandez responded that the memo is clear: the mayor can order the study, and if the results show that an area meets the criteria for a vessel-congestion zone, the county can legally impose speed limits or boating restrictions. He reiterated that the 2024 report was well done, but it left a major gap since Marine Patrol explicitly said they lacked the capability to conduct the congestion study, and the county never hired the

outside firm needed to complete it. Andy said he would strongly support recommending that the mayor revisit the report and order the study.

- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle added that the cross-jurisdiction enforcement issue is exactly the kind of problem the task force needs to address under its interagency-coordination pillar. The “whose sign is it?” problem is widespread and needs a structural fix.
- Mike Simpson then noted that on major holidays including Columbus Day Regatta, July 4th, New Year’s, the Coast Guard already imposes temporary large-scale no-wake zones in South Bay. That shows there *are* tools available for congestion-based restrictions; the question is how to apply them more consistently.
- Chairman Fernandez referenced a previous presentation showing that some North Bay channels are manatee zones during the season (idle speed), but revert to 30 mph outside of manatee season. The group had asked how those restrictions could be expanded in congested areas, and the answer pointed back to the vessel-congestion study. He said this is a clear, actionable recommendation: order the study so the county can finally determine whether year-round restrictions are warranted. He closed by asking Aabad and Glenn to coordinate and send their consolidated recommendations to Katie and Nancy. The mayor’s staff will review them, identify any follow-up questions, and begin drafting the report. Andy said the March 26 meeting will be pushed into April so the full group can participate and make any final adjustments before the report is finalized.

#### 5. **REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD:**

- **John Conley, I-911 International** - Miami-based search-and-rescue tracking company, which supports agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard, FWC, and the National Park Service, and said this was his first time attending the task-force meeting. He offered the company’s assistance—particularly with data collection, tracking information, and after-action reporting—explaining that their system captures tracking data, dispatcher communications, and transmitted media while keeping personal data restricted to law enforcement. He added that I-911 is currently developing a boater-safety app at the request of the Coast Guard and invited the task force to collaborate if it would support their goals, closing by thanking the group for their work.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle suggested that the task force’s final report should recommend not only creating a permanent advisory board but also outlining the types of expertise or stakeholder groups such as municipal representatives or the League of Cities that should be included.
- Chairman Fernandez agreed and asked whether the task force could formally recommend specific membership.
- The County Attorney clarified that while the task force cannot make recommendations directly to the Board of County Commissioners, it can recommend that the mayor advocate for certain features or areas of expertise in the board’s composition.
- Aabad Melwani asked about coordinating drafts.
- Nancy Jackson reminded the group that she cannot act as a go-between due to Sunshine Law restrictions; instead, members must submit their portions separately so staff can compile them and share them publicly for individual review before the next meeting.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle asked whether the task force could hold a publicly noticed Zoom meeting to workshop recommendations without violating Sunshine Law.

- The County Attorney said they would need to research whether virtual Sunshine meetings are still permitted post-COVID, though in-person noticed workshops are definitely allowed.
- The group then clarified who would draft which recommendation sections:
  - Waterway Management: Aabad will handle items 1, 2, and 9; Andy will take item 7; Glenn will contribute to Pillar 4 items (3, 4, and possibly 8);
  - Boater Safety Education: Nick will cover boater-education items
  - Law Enforcement: KFR will draft items 2 and 5, incorporating related subsections, with Mike assisting on land-based enforcement.
- Nancy reminded everyone that she cannot act as an intermediary due to Sunshine restrictions, but staff can compile submissions once received.
- State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle closed by asking the County Attorney to research what powers a future permanent advisory board could have, what recommendations the task force may make regarding its structure or expertise, and whether any of those features could be codified by ordinance.

**For more information and updates on the Boater Safety and Biscayne Bay Education Task Force, visit: [www.miamidade.gov/biscaynebay](http://www.miamidade.gov/biscaynebay)**