



Captiva Community Panel

MINUTES

Jan. 13, 2026

Attending: David Mintz, Jon Rosen, Linda Laird, Ken Suarez, Jay Brown, John Wade, Michael Bennett, Bob Rando, Margarethe Thye-Miville

Audience: 34 at peak

The meeting convened at 9:01 am, and the Dec. 9, 2025 minutes were unanimously approved (Thye-Miville/Brown).

The discussion began with David Mintz addressing community issues, including ongoing lawsuits and a bond referendum, followed by the unanimous election of officers for 2026. David Mintz was re-elected as president (Brown motion), Bruce McDonald as vice president, and Jay Brown as secretary, while Sandy Stilwell was re-nominated for treasurer (all on motions by Mintz). Following the elections, LCSO Sgt Rich Zeltman provided a report highlighting the need for community awareness regarding law enforcement and safety, particularly concerning the impact of golf carts on local dune systems and the importance of securing personal property.

Captiva Fire Chief Jeff Pawul and board chair Jeff Brown presented details about the Captiva Fire District's upcoming referendum, which seeks a maximum of \$24 million for critical improvements, including a resilient fire station and emergency facilities. They clarified that the referendum is not related to the Rauschenberg property sale, and emphasized the urgency of these upgrades for public safety. The discussion included the potential financial implications for taxpayers, with assurances that costs would vary based on property selection and interest rates, aiming to keep tax increases manageable.

CEPD General Manager Brighton Heard provided updates on dune restoration efforts, including the removal of Australian Pines and the re-evaluation of dune crossings to ensure beach access for property owners. He stressed the importance of community involvement in decisions regarding dune aesthetics and heights. Additionally, SCCF's Matt DePaolis discussed legislative updates, water management concerns, and community pushback against low-flying helicopter tours near Fort Myers Beach, while also addressing safety improvements along Captiva Drive.

Legal issues surrounding the South Seas redevelopment were highlighted by Mintz, with ongoing appeals and a complaint regarding public records. The panel discussed the implications of these legal matters and the need for legal representation. The conversation also touched on the complexities of zoning regulations for the Rauschenberg property and the rising costs associated with Captiva's central sewer system. Michael Bennett updated the group on the county's fortification project, along with reports on wastewater and stormwater efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 am (Thye-Miville/Bennett). Video link for the meeting is <https://youtu.be/IRvjFMKKFOM>.

Chapters & Topics:

Election of Officers and Community Updates

David Mintz welcomed participants and highlighted ongoing community challenges, such as lawsuits and a bond referendum. The panel then moved to elect its officers for 2026, with Mintz continuing as president and Bruce McDonald as vice president. Jay Brown was nominated and accepted the position of secretary, while Sandy Stilwell was re-nominated as treasurer.

Concerns About Beach Safety and Law Enforcement Updates

Sgt. Rich Zeltman highlighted the issue of golf carts driving on the beach, which harms the dune system and is against the law. Brown questioned how visitors would know about these restrictions, and Tony Lapi noted that law enforcement presence helps maintain safety and security on Captiva. Sgt. Zeltman also provided statistics on crime and traffic enforcement, indicating ongoing efforts to protect the community.

Captiva Fire District Referendum Update

Chief Jeff Pawul and board chair Jeff Brown discussed the Captiva Fire District's referendum set for Feb. 10, highlighting that only registered voters of Captiva can participate. Pawul clarified that the referendum seeks a maximum of \$24 million for essential fire district needs, which are not linked to the Rauschenberg property sale. He urged residents to vote, stressing the importance of addressing public safety and future community needs.

Pawul highlighted that the needs identified for the referendum remain unchanged, stressing the importance of moving forward regardless of the property's current ownership. The maximum cost is \$24 million, but actual taxpayer costs will depend on various factors, including property selection and interest rates. Brown added that if a less expensive property is identified, the financial burden on taxpayers would decrease significantly.

Brown discussed the necessity of a dedicated helicopter landing zone for the Captiva Fire District, stressing that the community should have a say in the referendum process. The speaker pointed out that the fire district has outgrown its current facilities and that future needs must be addressed, including potential funding from state and federal sources. The importance of community support for the referendum was reiterated to ensure the fire district can respond effectively to future challenges.

Dune Restoration and Community Engagement Updates

Brighton Heard reported on the recent board meeting where he proposed completing the dune restoration process, which includes installing ropes and bollards and additional plantings. He highlighted the Australian Pine removal program, with 60 trees set for removal, and invited property owners to contact his office for tree removal requests. Additionally, he addressed the need for re-evaluating dune crossings to ensure accessibility for all property owners along the beach.

Legislative Updates and Local Issues

Matt DePaolis shared that the legislative session has begun and urged everyone to sign up for action alerts to stay informed on legislative priorities. He reported that the water situation remains critical, with the lake level at 13.2 feet and minimal flows in the estuary. Additionally, he highlighted community concerns regarding a helicopter charter company conducting low-flying tours that disrupt kayaking and wildlife.

County South Seas Redevelopment Legal Update

David Mintz reported that the legal situation surrounding the South Seas redevelopment remains unchanged, with appeals regarding the 912-unit limitation and rezoning still pending. A complaint has been filed against the Captiva Community Panel by South Seas, claiming insufficient compliance with public records requests. Mintz suggested hiring attorney Michael Witt to manage the defense and requested support from Protect Captiva to cover legal fees with the panel acting as the client; panel approval was unanimous (Brown/Suarez).

Update on Rauschenberg Property Bidding Process

David Mintz detailed the bidding situation for the Rauschenberg property, highlighting that the fire department and a community investor were among the final bidders. Despite their involvement, they were not informed that a contract had been signed with another bidder, likely South Seas, which raised concerns about the handling of the process. The speaker expressed disappointment regarding the potential implications for the community and Bob Rauschenberg's legacy.

David Mintz clarified that the Captiva Code restricts development on the 20 acres to three units per acre, similar to the rest of Captiva. He expressed skepticism about the county's willingness to maintain this limitation, especially given past exemptions for South Seas. The discussion highlighted concerns that granting variances for the Rauschenberg property could lead to broader implications for zoning across Captiva. The panel approved sending a letter drafted by Mintz to the panel list to update the community (Rosen/Suarez).

County Commissioner Appointment and Development Updates

The appointment of Trish Petrosky as the new county commissioner was confirmed by Mintz, who clarified that she is not Amanda Cochran (a candidate who had run for the position in the prior election). Jay Brown highlighted the complicated zoning issues surrounding the Rauschenberg property, noting that changes to land development codes require a formal process. Ken Suarez added that any proposed changes would involve multiple levels of approval and public meetings.

Discussion on Sewer System Alternatives for Captiva

Jay Brown discussed the unexpected rise in costs for the central sewer system in Captiva, attributing it to necessary infrastructure upgrades in Sanibel. He proposed that hardening the FGUA plant could be a more cost-effective solution and highlighted the importance of collaboration with the county to gain support. David Mintz raised concerns about the feasibility of the FGUA alternative compared to the Sanibel option.

Fundraiser and Project Updates

Margarethe Thye-Miville shared details about an upcoming fundraiser on Feb. 13, emphasizing the Valentine's theme and entertainment by Kat Eppel. She plans to post a flyer at the post office and is awaiting final sponsorship confirmations before sending out invitations. David acknowledged Margarethe's efforts and encouraged attendance.

Action Items:

- Jeff Pawul will provide updates on the referendum and fire district needs to the community.
- Brighton Heard will implement the dune restoration process, including installing ropes and bollards.

- David Mintz will ask attorney Michael Witt to review the complaint regarding the public records request and to defend the panel in this matter.
- David Mintz will request the legal team of Protect Captiva to support the litigation effort against the panel and to pay for the attorneys associated with it.
- Ken Gooderham will send out the draft letter to the panel members and community regarding the Rauschenberg property and the referendum.

Key Questions:

- What are the specific needs of the fire district that the referendum aims to address?
- How will the community be informed about the referendum and its implications?
- How will the community be involved in the decision-making process if the referendum passes?
- What is the current status of the appeal regarding the 912-unit limit on South Seas?
- What is the timeline for the Rauschenberg property sale and its implications for the community?
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