

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 6, 2020

From: Commissioner Costa Vatikiotis

To: Mayor and Board of Commissioners

Subj: Authorize Planning of "Hope Day"

I would like to propose establishing a day of hope or "Hope Day" for Tarpon Springs. The idea resulted from a discussion a couple of weeks ago on Facebook between a childhood friend and myself. Others joined in, as well. It also involves a couple of historical coincidences that are timely.

The discussion concerned recognizing the remaining sponge boats operating from the Sponge Docks, their importance to Tarpon Springs, the fact that we take them for granted, and it is getting harder for them to continue. These thoughts are not unlike many things that are in the forefront of residents' minds, like the concerns of losing open space, the adverse effects of sea level rise, the challenges of maintaining the river channel, and the rapid disappearance of housing that is affordable, just to name a few.

The whole discussion and these challenges gave me pause to think, especially in this climate of uncertainty brought on by COVID. Thinking back, I recalled that the first sponge boat with helmeted divers was named "Hope" (or "Elpis" in Greek). I also confirmed that it sailed from Tarpon Springs on June 18, 1905. As such, the name and the timing were perfect. So, I thought it fitting that there should be a proclamation on June 18th, for commemorating the importance of all the things that help define Tarpon Springs and for which we are concerned over losing, including the sponge boats and the people that operate them.

"Hope Day" symbolizes that we should remain "hopeful" that tomorrow will be better and brighter for Tarpon Springs than today. "Hope Day" is consistent with that thought and with the circumstance of that first sailing of the sponge

boat "Hope" of not knowing how things would turn out except with the "hope" that they would.

I have taken the idea of a celebratory event at the Sponge Docks to the Tarpon Springs Merchants Association, and the Association subsequently decided that it would like to help for which I am appreciative. The event that day would be like the tree lighting where the streets are unaffected. Obviously, I would hope Mayor Alahouzos would want to officiate the event with the reading of a proclamation and a poem of remembrance of all of Tarpon Springs pioneers, including those of the sponge and marine industries. I know the perfect poem, and I would also be happy to write the proclamation. This would be followed by refreshments and some light music that the Tarpon Springs Merchants Association and I would arrange.

Tom Funcheon may have mentioned a brief conversation we had with a couple of the "Merchants" board members at its "meet and greet" last Friday. I got the sense that the event is doable without much impact on City resources.

I do not see this as a Merchants Association event, as much as a City event, to make it easy. So, the Commission would need to approve the idea before moving forward with the planning. Initially, I had wanted to wait until the Mayor had returned. After a brief conversation with City Manager Lecouris, it seemed best, primarily due to the lengthy May 25th agenda, to bring the event's authorization forward now. Final approval of the proclamation will be at the meeting of June 8th.

Thank you.

Sent: Monday, May 10, 2021 8:20:45 AM

To: Michele Manousos <mmanousos@ctsfl.us>; Irene Jacobs <ijacobs@ctsfl.us>

Cc: Mark LeCouris <mlecouris@ctsfl.us>

Subject: FW: Sponge diver recognition

From: Chris Alahouzos <calahouzos@ctsfl.us>

Sent: Sunday, May 9, 2021 11:41 AM

To: Mark LeCouris <mlecouris@ctsfl.us>

Subject: Fwd: Sponge diver recognition

Good afternoon Mark.

I received the attached email from Mrs. Lisa Benitez suggesting to honor our Sponge Divers.

I believe it is related with item number 17 on the agenda. Please share it with the BOC during the discussion.

Regards

Chris Alahouzos

Sent from my iPhone

Sent: Tuesday, April 27, 2021 12:30 PM
To: Lisa Benitez
Cc: Mark LeCouris
Subject: RE: Sponge diver recognition

Hi Lisa,

That is a good idea and I am in support of the suggestion.

I need to meet with Mr. LeCouris to find out the best way of accomplishing this and having the Historical Society involved as well.

Thank you,
Mayor Alahouzos

From: Lisa Benitez
Sent: Tuesday, April 27, 2021 12:10 PM
To: Chris Alahouzos <calahouzos@ctsfl.us>
Subject: Sponge diver recognition

External Email - Use caution with links and attachments

Dear Mayor Alahouzos,

A suggestion was made on the I Grew up in Tarpon Springs 2 Facebook page, for the city to honor the few existing sponge boats, divers, and crew in some way. Many people liked the idea on the Facebook page.

I personally would add that sponge boats, divers and crews be included. What a wonderful community project this could be!

Thank you. Lisa Benitez
733 North Florida Avenue, Tarpon Springs Florida 34689