



# Agenda Report

2725 Judge Fran Jamieson  
Way  
Viera, FL 32940

## Consent

F.17

9/15/2020

### Subject:

Approval, Re: 1-year extension to the TDC Capital Facilities Grant agreement with the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) the Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge (MIWR) Community Conservation Education Center (CCEC).

### Fiscal Impact:

Original grant award was \$500,000, \$6,525.33 has already been reimbursed. Move the grant reimbursement balance of \$493,474.67 to FY 20/21 from Tourism Capital Facilities fund 1443. This will leave the ending available cash balance for FY20/21 at \$3,763,871

### Dept/Office:

Tourism Development Office

### Requested Action:

It is requested that the Board of County Commissioners approve the Tourist Development Council's recommendation to extend the timing of funding for the Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge Community Conservation Education Center for an additional year to September 18, 2021.

### Summary Explanation and Background:

According to the ordinance regarding Tourist Tax Budget Plan, 14% of budgeted TDT revenues can be used for tourism-related capital facilities projects. The Tourism Community Development Plan was developed by the Tourist Development Council. At the July 5, 2018 meeting, the Capital Facilities Committee approved a reimbursement grant to the MIWR. The grant agreement between the County and MIWA was \$500,000. Funding would be via cash reimbursement from available TDC capital facilities fund balance or the most economical funding available to the County and recommended consideration and approval of the Tourism Development Council. The TDC approved this project at their July 25, 2018 meeting. The Board of County Commissioners, in regular session on September 18, 2018, approved the Tourism Community Development Plan Phase II which included the MIWR. In this agreement, the project was due to commence construction by September 18, 2020 or funding would be withdrawn. Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) has requested a 1-year extension, with construction commencing by September 18, 2021. The TDC Capital Facilities Committee, at their August 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, and the Tourist Development Council, at their August 26, 2020 meeting voted to grant the extension.

Tourism Development Tax revenues are restricted to authorized uses as defined by Florida Statute 125.0104, directed by Brevard County Code Chapter I 02, Article III, Local Option Tax Plan. In regards to Capital Facilities funding, the statute states authorized uses of these funds are "to acquire, construct, extend, enlarge, remodel,

repair, improve, maintain, operate or promote one or more publicly owned and operated convention centers, sports stadiums, sports arenas, coliseums, or auditoriums within the county; and further include museums, zoological parks, aquariums, fishing piers or nature centers which are publicly owned and operated or owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public within the county”.

**Clerk to the Board Instructions:**

Please return a memo of the Board’s action to Tourism and CAO.



Kimberly Powell, Clerk to the Board, 400 South Street • P.O. Box 999, Titusville, Florida 32781-0999

Telephone: (321) 637-2001  
Fax: (321) 264-6972  
Kimberly.Powell@brevardclerk.us

September 16, 2020

**M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO:** Peter Cranis, Tourism Development Office Director

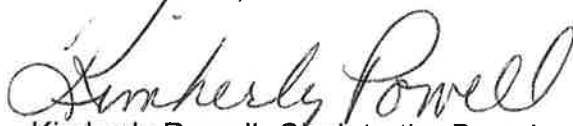
**RE:** Item F.17., One-Year Extension to the Tourist Development Council (TDC) Capital Facilities Grant Agreement with the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) and the Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge (MIWR) Community Conservation Education Center (CCEC)

The Board of County Commissioners, in regular session on September 15, 2020, approved the TDC's recommendation to extend the timing of funding for the MIWR CCEC for one-year, to September 18, 2021.

Your continued cooperation is always appreciated.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
SCOTT ELLIS, CLERK

  
Kimberly Powell, Clerk to the Board

/ds

cc: County Attorney  
Finance  
Budget



## *Merritt Island Wildlife Association*

P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 Phone: 321-861-2377

Fed ID# 59-3289841

[www.merrittislandwildlife.org](http://www.merrittislandwildlife.org)

*Friends of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex since 1994*

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Brevard County Tourism Development Council  
430 Brevard Ave  
Cocoa, FL 32922

August 21, 2020

Re: Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Education Center Exhibits

Dear Peter,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) are working together to build a state-of-the-art Community Conservation Education Center (CCEC) at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) to welcome and educate visitors and local residents about this unique natural landscape. MIWA applied for and received a \$500,000 grant from the TDC to be used for construction of indoor and outdoor exhibits at the CCEC. The deadline to begin construction of the educational exhibits is September 18, 2020 or the \$500,000 will be forfeited.

Unfortunately, construction of the building and related exhibits has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, Governor Ron DeSantis issued an executive order declaring a State of Emergency in Florida in response to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Subsequently, the Department of Interior (DOI) issued guidance for DOI offices to temporarily close. Workers were placed on telework health/safety leave, depending on their eligibility. FWS's headquarter and regional offices were subjected to lengthy process delays and backlogs due to operational shutdowns and responses to the COVID-19 Emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic put the FWS's contracting efforts for this project seriously behind schedule. The FWS contract for the interior exhibits is slowly moving through channels in the regional office due to employees working remotely. Once awarded we expect the design, construction and installation process to take 12 to 14 months.

Construction of the building itself has also been delayed. Originally planned for ground breaking in 2018, FWS funding delays resulted in construction being pushed to 2020. The architectural plans are at the 95% completed stage. A planned ground breaking in June did not occur due to delays related to COVID-19. Currently, groundbreaking is planned for some time in September but there is no guarantee that it will happen then either.



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Once construction begins, it should take 14 to 16 months to complete the project. We are currently expecting to welcome the public into the new building in December 2021.

The pandemic also slowed contracting related to the both the indoor and outdoor exhibits. MIWA staff and board meetings were limited. Several vendors were interviewed, and when possible, site visits were conducted. In July, Cre8Play was selected to provide nature-themed outdoor play-structures for children. Wilderness Graphics was selected to provide the indoor exhibits. Contracts for each company are still being negotiated.

MIWA and the FWS are fully committed to providing relevant educational exhibits to engage and educate visitors. Although COVID-19 has delayed the construction of the building and exhibits, our visitors continue to seek sanctuary on the refuge in record numbers. Even with various facility closures during the recent months, nearly 3 million visits were recorded during the past 12 months, with the highest visitation in the last few months.

Due to the delays, MIWA is respectfully requesting a six-month extension for the date to begin construction of the educational exhibits for the new Conservation and Education Center at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. We anticipate that will allow enough time to finish negotiating the contracts and start building the exhibits.

Please let me know if you have any questions. My cell number is 321-794-6866. We deeply appreciate your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurilee Thompson".

Laurilee Thompson, President Merritt Island Wildlife Association