



**Agenda Item:** Presentation of the Blue Flag Program and Visitor Intercept Study

**Background:** The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) has initiated a US wide pilot project to introduce Blue Flag eco-certification for beaches and marinas to the country. The Blue Flag program is a product of the Federation of Environmental Education (FEE) in Europe and has certified over 4,600 sites in 50 countries across the globe, including Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean.

This third party environmental quality control program is awarded by a National Jury based on fulfillment of 32 criteria in four broad categories; safety & security, environmental education, water quality and environmental management.

Upon achieving the criteria, the awarded location can raise the Blue Flag during the visitor season as a mark of good environmental quality and management. Any default in compliance does require the flag to be lowered, but the continual classification of a beach as Blue Flag validates marketing around clean and safe beaches.

The Park Board of Trustees offered to be one of four pilots running nationally. The other destinations include Hawaii, California and Florida. The Park Board staff has conducted a gap analysis against the proposed US criteria and believes that RA Apffel Park, or East Beach, is the most viable contender for the eco-certification.

A full list of proposed criteria is attached here, together with an overview of the more complex water quality requirements.

While most of the criteria are already being met by the Park Board in the management of East Beach, there are a few items that will require additional policy or financial support from the Board of Trustees. Principally among them;

- Criteria 10: The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for microbiological parameter *Escherichia coli* (faecal coli bacteria) and intestinal enterococci (streptococci),
- Criteria 23: Access to the beach by dogs and other domestic animals must be strictly controlled,
- Criteria 26: A sustainable means of transportation should be promoted in the beach area,
- Criteria 33: At least one beach in the municipality must have access and facilities provided for the physically disabled.

Numerous other criteria are easily obtained, most notably;

- Criteria 12: The local beach operator should establish a beach management committee,
- Criteria 14: Sensitive areas must be managed,
- Criteria 16: Algal vegetation or national debris must be left on the beach,
- Criteria 22: No authorized camping or driving and no dumping on the beach,
- Criteria 28: First aid equipment must be available on beach,
- Criteria 31: There must be safety measure in place to protect beach users and free access must be granted to the public.

Park Board staff will work with BMAC and PAC over the next year to raise awareness around the program and to gather input on the “No Domestic Animals” and “Sustainable Transportation” requirements.

Park Board staff is currently working with the Texas General Land Office and County Health Office on requirements for water quality testing, including additional E Coli testing. Additional costing is at the expense of the Park Board, while standard enterococci testing is conducted regularly during the swimming season by the Texas GLO in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency and Galveston County Health Office.

Beach Patrol is supporting Blue Flag at a national level through participation by the US Lifeguarding Association on the National Jury.

As well, Kristin Butler, a master’s student in Anthropology at the University of North Texas will be conducting a study on the implementation of Blue Flag program at East Beach for her master’s thesis. Kristen received her BA from Texas State University. While earning her undergraduate degree, she volunteered at the Witt Museum in San Antonio and more recently during her graduate studies, Kristen took part in a qualitative research at the Perot Museum in Dallas. Her current focus on environmental anthropology prepares her for studying human relationships with the environment. This summer she will be conducting a survey of East Beach visitors to gauge the importance of environmental quality in visitor perceptions.

A timeline for the probational implementation of Blue Flag criteria, and then application and award follows.