HISTORICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HAC) Meeting Minutes

May 13, 2026

Location: Mid-County Regional Library

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at **9:00 AM**.

Committee Members

Deborah Fitch
Karen Hartman
Dianne Munson
Theresa Murtha
Clare Riggs
Pat Spence - Absent
John Valickas

County Staff- Libraries & History
Jennifer Zoebelein
Mechelle Simes

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2. Approval of Minutes

Members confirmed they reviewed the prior meeting minutes.
- Motion to approve: **Deborah**
- Second: **Karen**
- Vote: **Approved unanimously**

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3. Proposal: Street Sign Topper – Cape Haze Marine Laboratory / Mote Marine Origins

Presenter: John

John provided documentation regarding the historic significance of the **Cape Haze Marine Laboratory**, originally established in **1955**, which ultimately evolved into **Mote Marine Laboratory**.

Key points:

- John contacted Mote Marine CEO, Dr. Crosby, who expressed enthusiasm for a future **historical marker**, ideally coordinated with their **2027 board meeting** in Boca Grande.

- Mote Marine will ensure accuracy of marker wording; they may cover costs.
- The Cape Haze Property Owners Association may provide land easements and installation space for the future marker.
- While the formal marker is on hold until 2027, John proposed installing a **street sign topper** now at **Gaspar Drive & Placida Road** to recognize the laboratory's original site.
- Visual mock-ups and historic images were shared.

Motion: Recommend to the Board of County Commissioners the installation of a "Cape Haze Marine Laboratory / Mote Marine Origin" street sign topper.
Second: Claire
Vote: Unanimous approval

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4. Social Media Presence – Increasing Local History Content

John suggested increasing **Charlotte County history posts** on the Library & History Facebook page.
Discussion points:

- Current library Facebook posts focus mostly on library events with little local history.
- John shared examples of high-engagement content from his community history Facebook page.
- Members and staff acknowledged the benefit of increasing local history visibility, possibly posting once weekly or bi-weekly.
- Additional conversation noted other history-focused pages, including Punta Gorda History Center's Facebook presence.

No motion required—discussion only.

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5. Update: Trestle Marker / Bridge Tender House Signage

Staff reported:

- Installing signage **directly on the trestle** is **not recommended** due to prior vandalism and lack of public accessibility (shallow water, boat-only access).
- A better long-term location would be the **Placida Fishing Pier** once rebuilt.
- The pier is county-owned, publicly accessible, and historically tied to the trestle.
- Future signage could combine:
  • The old trestle
  • Bridge tender's house
  • Local fishing industry history

Staff will bring updates to future agendas.

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6. Future Historical Marker: Placida Fishery & Fishing Industry

Discussion highlighted the importance of recognizing the history of the **Placida Fishery**, a major part of Charlotte County's heritage.

- Site is now private property, but nearby county-owned land (pier/parking) may offer placement options.
- Members agreed the topic should remain on future agendas.
- Signage format options include:
  • Traditional historical marker
  • **Interpretive signage** (preferred due to flexibility, image use, and higher content capacity)

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7. Update: Placida Bunkhouse Marker (Text Revision)

John asked about progress on removing or revising outdated wording from the **Placida Bunkhouse** historic marker.
Staff reported:

- Work has **not begun yet** due to resources and budget constraints.
- The target paragraph is outdated, reflecting a past fundraising vision rather than current reality.
  Additional clarification:
- The marker dates from **2008**, and the bottom paragraph references plans that never materialized.
- Intent is to revise the marker to focus strictly on historical facts.

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8. Hotel Punta Gorda Marker – Status

A member asked for an update on the destroyed **Hotel Punta Gorda** marker.

Staff summarized:

- The marker was fully destroyed in Hurricane Ian except for the pole.
- Replacing it requires **City of Punta Gorda approval**, because placement is on **city property**.
- The city requested extensive applications, board presentations, and procedural steps.
- Due to workload (post-hurricane, Freeman House issues), the city has not moved forward.
- HAC members may choose to follow up directly with city leadership.

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9. Updates Requested Regarding Street Sign Topper

John asked if staff could share updates ahead of the next meeting regarding Board decisions on the ape Haze Marine Laboratory street topper.
Staff agreed to pass along updates when received.

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10. Announcements & Additional Business

- Staff offered a **tour of the building** to members before the library opened at 10:00 AM.
- No additional new or old business was raised.

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11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned shortly before 10:00 AM.
A guided tour followed.