

BELLEAIR SHORE WANTS UNATTENDED BEACH HOLES FILLED TOWN CITES SAFETY RISK TO BEACH-GOERS, SEA TURTLES

/BY: **Carlos Moncada**

BELLEAIR SHORE—Digging holes in the sand is a common summer pastime, but this tiny coastal town wants to make sure you fill them back in when you leave.

Without discussion, the town commission recently adopted an ordinance regulating beach-hole digging, citing potential safety risks to the public and life-threatening obstacles to sea turtles.

"It shall be required that all holes dug on the beach are to be attended at all times and shall be completely filled and restored to their original level condition prior to leaving the beach the same day it is created," the ordinance reads.

The measure is similar to those in other beachfront communities, including Indian Rocks Beach, which is just south of the town. The Indian Rocks ordinance, adopted in 2020, states, "Holes dug on the beach are required to be attended and shall be filled prior to leaving the public beach."

Such holes can pose a pitfall for



Holes on the beach can be a serious threat to nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings. Credit Pinellas County.

beach-goers, especially at night, and can trap and injure nesting sea turtles. Last year, a 7-year-old girl in south Florida died after a hole she and a sibling were digging at a beach near Fort Lauderdale collapsed.

It could not be determined whether there were any instances of beach holes causing injuries or problems in

Belleair Shore, an upscale residential community of 57 Gulf-front mansions.

Neither the town's mayor, Steve Blume, nor town attorney Daniel P. Lewis responded to requests for comment from Pinellas Press on how the ordinance would be enforced. The measure doesn't specify what penalties may be imposed against violators.

The town's mile-long beach is primarily for its 70 or so residents and their visitors. It has three resident-only beach access points, but no public access. As such, Belleair Shore receives no benefit from publicly funded beach renourishment projects.

Another curious ordinance could soon be on the books: Last month, commissioners held a first reading on a measure banning shark fishing from shore. No word on when a second and final reading will be held. Other beach communities where dead sharks have occasionally washed ashore have adopted similar restrictions in recent years, including Indian Shores and Redington Shores.

Belleair Shore has a colorful history of passing strict rules aimed at enhancing its privacy and maintaining a sense of seclusion.

It once drew worldwide attention for outlawing coffee-drinking on the beach. It also banned umbrellas, tents and other "temporary shade structures."

Both rules were ultimately relaxed in response to public outrage over attempts to prosecute violators.