

Florida board votes to accept Patriots Point sub for underwater reef

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Jan 10, 2017



Patriots Point officials say the Clamagore is too costly to maintain. File

Patriot Point's Cold War submarine is another step closer to becoming an underwater attraction for marine life and divers off the coast of Florida.

The Palm Beach County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted Tuesday to hire a company to haul the Clamagore from Mount Pleasant and sink it about a mile off Juno Beach.

The Clamagore would still be an attraction at its new home about 90 feet under the Atlantic, according to a presentation by Rob Robbins with Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management. Divers could look inside, and a museum on shore would display some of the instruments, photographs and history.

The plan is to sink the sub in July, in time for the summer diving season, although the contract gives Artificial Reefs International of Miami a year to finish the job if needed. A moving date would be set within the next couple months.

Palm Beach County agreed to pay \$1 million for Key West-based Artificial Reefs International to haul the sub on a barge to Florida and attach it to the ocean floor. The money would come from registration fees paid by Florida boat owners.

The moving company will have to raise another \$3 million for cleanup costs. Before the sub can be put in the ocean, all pollutants and loose parts have to be removed. A couple of the seven commissioners questioned whether the money could be raised. Robbins said supporters have already donated about half the money and Artificial Reefs was confident the rest would come in after the county approved the project.

If the cleanup money is not raised, the sub won't be sunk, the county won't pay the \$1 million and the roughly 322-foot-long vessel would likely be scrapped.

The Naval Sea Systems Command also has to approve scuttling the historic sub. Palm Beach County officials say they don't expect that process to delay their **target** date.

The sub would be attached to the ocean floor so that it rests upright and can withstand a hurricane. The propeller, conning tower "and any other structural components that give this vessel its unique character as a submarine" must be kept. The plan says that large openings would be cut in the hull so divers could get in and out, but some of the commissioners said it would be safer to peel the back the skin and let divers look through bars.

"We don't imagine divers going inside but they could look inside," Robbins told the board.

The county expects the project to pay for itself by boosting the area's reputation as a diving destination. More than 45 other ships have already been sunk in the area, including the Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk and transport ship Vandenberg.

The Patriots Point board has been saying for several years that it can no longer afford to keep the Clamagore and that the vessel would be moved to Florida if veteran groups couldn't raise the money for an alternative plan.

