

City of Jacksonville

*1st Floor - Lynwood Roberts Room
117 W. Duval Street*



Meeting Minutes - Final

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

9:00 AM

Lynwood Roberts Rm, 1st Floor, City Hall

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

CM Nick Howland, Chair

CM Randy DeFoor, Vice Chair

CM LeAnna Cumber - Excused Late Arrival (9:09 am)

CM Tyrona Clark-Murray, Alternate

Jon Michael Barker

Robert Birtalan - Excused Absence

Lane Burnett

Representative Kiyon Michael

Mark Devereaux

Andrew Fraden

Marc Hardesty - Excused Absence

Richard Hartley - Excused Absence

Richard J. Redick

General Public Rep. (Vacant)

Marshall Adkison, Ex-Officio

Adam Hoyles, Ex-Officio - Late Arrival (9:05 am)

Barbara Ireland Hobson, Legislative Assistant

Rebecca Bolton, Legislative Assistant

Rita Mairs, Office of General Counsel

Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University

Jeff Clements, Chief of Research

Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator

Meeting Convened: 9:00 am**Meeting Adjourned: 10:59 am****1. Call To Order**

Chairman Howland called the meeting to order and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

2. Roll Call**3. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the May 10th, 2023 Waterways Commission were approved unanimously as distributed.

4. St. Johns River Status Report on Water Quality & Manatees

Contact:

Dr. Gerard Pinto, JU

Dr. Gerry Pinto of Jacksonville University's Marine Science Research Institute delivered the monthly report. Dr. Pinto participated in an aerial survey of Jacksonville and spotted 59 manatees, with none in the intercoastal waterway. There were six manatee deaths in the past month, including five watercraft-related deaths around Blount Island and one calf death due to abandonment by its mother. This brings the total deaths to 11 for the year. Dr. Pinto also noted that the river's salinity is high despite heavy rainfall. Dolphin activity is abundant and the temperature is significantly increasing. Fortunately, no toxic algae blooms have been reported yet, even though conditions are optimal for algae. Commissioner Fraden highlighted the extraordinary circumstance of five manatee deaths within one mile.

Adam Hoyles asked about a progress report on sea grass. Dr. Pinto responded that recovery is underway, with a promising exclusionary study also taking place. Commissioner Redick asked if the manatee deaths occurred in grassy areas, to which Dr. Pinto replied that the manatees were found around Blount Island, which is deeply dredged. During mating season, manatees can become disoriented and lose track of their location. In response to Commissioner Devereaux's question about the benefit of a public service announcement campaign, Dr. Pinto mentioned past PSAs, including manatee maps displayed on weather reports by Tim Deegan. Captain Suber added that these maps are distributed to boating groups to ensure awareness. CM Randy DeFoor asked about possible corrective action, to which Commissioner Devereaux remarked on the frequency of ships passing through.

5. Old Business**St Johns River Shoaling****a. Potential Local Funding Sources for Safety Markers**

Contact:

Brian Burket, Waterfront Project Manager

Committee Chair Howland summarized actions taken at the last JWC meeting and was pleased to announce that the Council Auditor's Office found a funding source for the signage. Rita Mairs, Office of General Counsel, read the proposed legislation to appropriate funds for the signage. Mr. Devereaux remarked that \$75,000 was a significant sum and proposed he could secure donations for signage, preferring to use the City funds to investigate the problem's cause. Ms. Mairs passed the quote for signage to the Commission. Commissioner Barker inquired about the destination of unused funds, and Brian Burket from the Parks Department replied they would be returned to the General Fund. CM LeAnna Cumber questioned the signage budget, insurance, and concrete testing. Mr. Burket clarified that neither insurance nor concrete testing was needed. Commissioner Fraden added that the signage would be reusable if the situation was resolved. CM Cumber queried the timing for the signage, which will begin once the legislation is approved and moves to contracting. Commissioner Redick asked about the decision to use five buoys. Captain Suber mentioned that they defer to the engineers and State on such matters. Mr. Burket added that they always aim to be conservative with estimates rather than going back to the City Council to request more. CM DeFoor moved to approve the legislation as drafted and Mr. Barker seconded the motion. John Nooney thanked Chair Howland for allowing public comments, emphasizing safety as the project's main priority. The motion passed unanimously.

b. JU Shoal Identification Study - Cost Breakdown of a Phase I Study & Phase II Study

Contact:

Dr. Jeremy Stalker, JU

Dr. Jeremy Stalker, Jacksonville University, informed the meeting that the Shoal Identification Study was initially proposed as a two-phase study. However, incorporating the request from the prior JWC meeting resulted in three phases to the study, from which the Commission could choose which or any to proceed with. Phase one would essentially be a pre-study answering the hypothesis, "is it there or not". This phase would involve undergraduate students taking samples and counting tracer grains. Phase two would identify if the shoal is growing or moving. The third phase would be more comprehensive, involving multiple colors in multiple sources.

CM DeFoor asked if the dredge spoil is from the USMC docks, and Dr. Stalker confirmed. CM DeFoor then asked about the options once liability is established, and Mr. Burket replied that he would defer to the City Council on that matter. He also mentioned that if liability is found, the Department of Defense would likely seek to make amends.

Commissioner Devereaux extensively discussed the growing shoal. He asserted that the spoil is from the Blount Island Marine Terminal, and although they are meant to collect the spoils, they are not disposing of them correctly, leading to overflow. He expressed his support for the signage but wished that the issue could be resolved rather than simply posting signs.

Commissioner Redick shared his experience at Blount Island Marine Terminal during his time conducting bird surveys. He suggested that the study could prompt a conversation with the Marine Corps about the amount of sand they allow there. He also advocated for the study to occur during a time of dredging, which happens every other year.

Regarding liability, Commissioner Redick mentioned that they had previously engaged with the Department of Defense, but the response was that they do not have records indicating the shoal is a problem. He also doubted any intent or incompetence, suggesting they might simply lack awareness of the issue.

Chair Howland directed the Commission to the minutes of the previous meeting, explaining how the Commission arrived at the current form of the study and that they would seek funding for the study.

CM DeFoor, Chair Howland, and Commissioner Baker had a brief discussion on the process of approaching the Department of Defense. Rita Mairs, OGC, expressed her concern that the Commission was approaching the situation backwards and recommended involving lawyers at the outset.

Beth Payne, Northeast Florida Regional Council, commented on the funding for the study. They were considering Military Installation Resilience Review programs for the site but did not have a short-term solution for the study's funding.

Chair Howland requested a motion and a second to authorize the chair to work with OGC to find a funding source for Phase I of the study. Commissioner Barker moved to approve, and Commissioner Devereaux seconded. After a brief discussion about the clarity of what the motion was to approve, Chair Howland asked for a motion to withdraw the motion. Commissioner Barker moved to withdraw, and Commissioner Devereaux seconded. The motion to withdraw passed unanimously. Chair Howland then clarified the initial motion to authorize the Chair to work with OGC to find funding in the budget for Phase I of the Shoal Identification Study and authorize contracting with JU for Phase I of the study. Commissioner Barker made the motion and CM DeFoor seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

c. Northeast Florida Regional Council - Potential Federal Grant Funds Available to fund JU Study.

Contact:
Elizabeth Payne, Chief Executive Director

Cesery Bridge - Non Regulatory Signage

Contact:
Brian Burket, Waterfront Project Manager

Brian Burket from the Parks Department reported that the department had managed to reduce the cost of non-regulatory signage enough to fund additional signs on University Bridge and Atlantic Bridge. As for Ortega signage, they have received approval for all but one permit, with the last permit expected to be approved that day.

6. Review of Past Year Actions

Chair Howland provided a brief overview of the actions the Commission has taken in the past year. Captain Suber gave an update on derelict vessels, reporting that they have received funding to remove six such vessels.

7. Public Comment

John Nooney made a public comment on the Tourist Development Council, amending the CIP, and the Pottsburg Creek Public Park.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

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Cory Armstrong

Council Research

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