

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

117 WEST DUVAL STREET, SUITE 425

4TH FLOOR, CITY HALL

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202

904-255-5200

**NOTICED MEETING OF AT-LARGE COUNCIL MEMBERS AT BEACHES WATCH MONTHLY MEETING**

**August 2, 2023**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Location:** Beaches Branch Library, 600 3rd Street, Neptune Beach, FL 32266

**In attendance:**

**City Council** **Members** Ron Salem (President), Matt Carlucci, Terrance Freeman, Nick Howland, Chris Miller

**Also in attendance**: Sandy Golding, Candace Kelly, Elaine Brown, Chris Hoffman, Curtis Ford, Cory Nichols, and Bill Gulliford.

**Meeting Convened**: 7:01 p.m.

Maria Mark, Beaches Watch President, called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM and gave updates regarding Beaches Watch and the Beaches community.

CM Matt Carlucci gave an update regarding Penman Road meetings that were held, and that the bid is out for the project. He shared that the 2nd Avenue safety improvements are roughly 30% complete and will be ready early in 2024. CM Carlucci also shared that the Jax Pier is complete, and the beaches renourishment project will be bid in late 2023 or early 2024.

CM Terrance Freeman shared his journey in government, introduced himself and his family, and also shared his priorities for children and seniors. He also shared successes of his recently concluded term as Council President and focus on workforce development, including the creation of the Jacksonville Upward Mobility Program initiative.

CM Nick Howland thanked Mayor Elaine Brown and her husband, Dick Brown, for being in attendance on their anniversary. CM Howland shared his priorities of safe streets, infrastructure investment, and jobs within a fiscally responsible government. He added that we have seen fully funded police in the current proposed budget and indicated that the Council would ensure its protection in the budget. He noted continued record investment in infrastructure. He noted that he has taken interest in the Durkeeville community as well as the Eastside. He will also be in attendance at the upcoming Penman Road meeting.

CM Chris Miller said that he had engaged on a months-long listening tour during his campaign for City Council At-Large Group 5, and that he had spent much of his campaign at the Beaches. He seeks to represent everyone in Jacksonville and has priorities of public safety, mainly in prevention, intervention, and enforcement. CM Miller also has the priority of infrastructure during his time on the Council.

President Salem said that the most frequent question he gets is his relationship with the Mayor, to which he said it was positive and shared stories of their collaboration. He laid out his priorities to the group as follows:

1. Orienting the new Council, to which he has been very pleased with their progress.
2. The continuing process of examining the jail. He noted that he is a mental health advocate and is supportive of the mental health offender program.
3. The Jaguars stadium which will be before the Council in the upcoming year. President Salem noted that under his leadership they have hired independent counsel to assist them in the process.
4. Opioid Crisis. President Salem informed that the Opioid settlements totaled $85m but the yearly amounts are front-loaded. He also shared that the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD) responds to roughly 10-15 overdoses daily.
5. Infant Mortality. 7/1000 newborns unfortunately pass, which is the highest in the state. The Council under the President’s leadership is working with the NE Florida Healthy Start Coalition to reduce the infant mortality rate.
6. Solid Waste. President Salem mentioned two projects, one of which was a partnership to regularly assess recycling bins to indicate the correct materials to recycle. The second was a pilot composting program in Riverside.
7. Coordination with the Duval County School Board.

He also mentioned initiatives involving J.P. Smalls Memorial Stadium and Blue Cypress Golf Course in Arlington.

**Q&A portion:**

Bill Gulliford gave an update on the development at Mayport and shared that Osearch received $5m and thanked Council President Salem for the support. He also thanked the Council for their support in building the new Sulzbacher campus. He asked a question about the solid waste fee and shared that in 2021 the beaches accounted for 11.9% of the taxes for roughly 3% of the population. He said that the beaches were in effect subsidizing the services of Jacksonville. CM Carlucci responded to his comments by saying he would like to better communicate with the Beaches and that he would like to address the loan. President Salem also indicated that it needs to be addressed. CM Freeman added context to the solid waste fee discussion.

Another resident offered praise for the new lifeguard station and the expanded community center. They indicated they would like to see a priority for Atlantic Beach resiliency.

Another resident asked the Council to address the Duval County School Board failing students and pointed to the 6th-grade reading proficiency scores, which stood at 38%. The resident also indicated support for Al Ferraro for the Director of Neighborhoods and asked the Council how they felt on the subject.

CM Carlucci said that he had supported the ½ penny sales tax, and commended President Salem for the scheduled joint meeting with the Duval County School Board. CM Freeman responded that he had served as the CEO of a literacy organization, and that birth to 3 is the most imperative time in a child's life regarding literacy. With this in mind, he had organized a book fair in every school and ensured access to three books for every student. CM Howland added that he did not support the ½ penny sales tax because he believed they could use the $300m in unallocated American Rescue Plan funds to use for teacher raises. He also indicated that no teachers have received funds from the ½ penny sales tax. CM Howland also indicated support for the continuing workforce training programs.

President Salem indicated that the Council has done what is in its purview regarding the School Board and pointed to the $45m in the Kids Hope Alliance budget. He also indicated that he believed that the applicant for the Director of Neighborhoods should have a college degree.

A resident gave a letter to the Council Members that encouraged them to look at the interlocal agreement again.

A resident asked that Mayport become more prominent and asked for an update regarding the docks at Mayport which was to be included in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). CM Howland indicated that there was $2m in the CIP for the project.

A resident expressed their opinion that the Beaches are a donor community for the Jaguars and expressed frustration with a new jail that is over 30 years old. CM Howland said that he was supportive of fiscally responsible governance and that he would look to monetize assets to pay down debt service. President Salem added that regarding the jail, it was built as a 25-year structure and they made an egregious error in building it up while most jails across the country are no more than two floors. He added that the conditions are so poor in the jail that the City will have a lawsuit on their hands if they are not careful.

Another resident expressed concern with investment in higher education, and rather than working for a new University of Florida (UF) campus to support existing higher education. The resident also indicated support for the PSG program. CM Freeman shared the initiatives that the Council has been involved with for the higher education campuses in Jacksonville and said that the UF campus will have a lasting impact in workforce development. CM Carlucci added that the PSG budget has increased from $3m to $9m from his first year in office to this current year.

The meeting adjourned at 8:24 PM.

**Meeting adjourned:** 8:24 p.m.

Minutes: Cory Armstrong, Council Research Division

904-255-5140 CoryA@coj.net

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