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RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**JACKSONVILLE WATERWAYS COMMISSION
ST. JOHNS RIVER SHOALING TASK FORCE**

Meeting Minutes

**October 25, 2023
10:00 a.m.**

Location: Don Davis Room, 1st floor, City Hall

In attendance: Council Member Mike Gay (Chair), Commissioners Marc Hardesty, Mark Devereaux, Adam Hoyles (*ex officio*)

Also: Jeff Clements - City Council Research Division; Capt. Jim Suber – City Waterways Coordinator; Dr. Gerry Pinto, Dr. Jeremy Stalker – Jacksonville University Marine Science Research Institute; Brian Burkett – Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department

Meeting Convened: 10:03 a.m.

Council Member Gay convened the meeting and the attendees introduced themselves for the record. Mr. Gay said he is looking forward to learning about the shoaling issue from the Waterways Commission members who have more history with this issue.

Safety marker update

Brian Burkett said legislation was passed by City Council to fund installation of marker buoys around the shoal for boater safety. The contract for installation is being developed through the Procurement Division (as an amendment to the City's continuing services contract with Hal Jones Contractor) and the permitting process with FDEP will be underway shortly. The Army Corps of Engineers, Coast Guard and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission may need to be consulted during the permitting process as well. He hopefully anticipates placement of the buoys by the end of the year. Commissioner Hardesty asked if the contracting and permitting processes could be bifurcated so that the permitting

process could be started while the contract is being finalized. Mr. Burkett said he would explore that possibility with the contractor and City's permitting consultant.

Shoal formation update

In response to a question from Chairman Gay, Dr. Pinto and Mr. Burkett said no definitive research has been done to date to determine where the shoal material is coming from. Capt. Suber said that placing the marker buoys around the shoal before the source of the material is determined won't be very effective because the shoal is continuing to grow and the markers will need to be moved as that occurs.

Commissioner Devereaux said it seems obvious to him that the adjacent Marine Corps dredge spoil site is the source of the material and it should be possible to capture samples of that material from the outfall pipes when there is a heavy rain or dredging activity taking place and flushing out the sediment. He said the material can be seen suspended in the water when there is a heavy rain event and the material is being flushed into the river. Comparing a sediment sample captured directly from the outfall pipes to the sediment in the shoal site should help determine if they are the same. He also suggested putting dye into the dredge spoil site to see if it then appears in the river.

Adam Hoyles said his experience is that the Marine Corps typically dredges the back river behind Blount Island every couple of years so information about the timing of the next dredging should be available to help determine when to do the sampling to get the best results. Dr. Jeremy Stalker said that there are several possibilities for where and how to place the tracer grains that could help distinguish between shoaling activity occurring during passive time periods (no dredging taking place) and active dredging periods to see if there is any noticeable difference in the growth of the shoal. He noted that dredge spoil from several different sites in the river is deposited into that spoil disposal site, so identifying multiple sources of the shoal sediment might require placement of the tracer grains in multiple places. Chairman Gay asked about the proposed budget for the project and whether funding is currently being sought. Dr. Stalker said the study has been broken into three phases with separate costs. Dr. Pinto pointed out that the tracer beads will take several months to order from the overseas manufacturer. Commissioner Hardesty said that the dredging of the back river typically takes place in the fall of every other year (October/November), and is not taking place this year, so probably occurring again in the fall of 2024.

Dr. Stalker said that pre-testing needs to be done to determine the size and composition of the grains in the spoil site so that matching tracer grains can be manufactured in the United Kingdom and returned to Jacksonville. If the dredging does occur in the fall of 2024, then preparations for the study, including the production of the tracer grains, need to be completed in the next 10 months for the preparatory work to begin before dredging begins. In response to a question from Capt. Suber, Dr. Stalker said that the tracer grains will need to be placed in the spoil site which will require permission from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Marine Corps to access the site, as well as proper permitting. Commissioner Devereaux said that he had spoken to an Army Corps official from South Florida about the dredge spoil site, that official was aware of the condition of the site, and said that the spoil site was at full capacity. Commissioner Hardesty said that both of Jacksonville's Congressional representatives seem to be supportive of the study idea.

Mr. Hoyle suggested attempting to seek friendly cooperation from the Marine Corps and the Army Corps of Engineers as a starting point rather than being adversarial. Dr. Pinto said he has made contact with environmental officials at the Marine Corps facility on Blount Island and they seemed potentially

interested in the proposal and willing to discuss the details. Dr. Stalker said that in his conversations with Marine Corps officials, they didn't seem opposed to the study and wanted more details about how it would be done. Chairman Gay said he would contact Jacksonville's Congressional delegation to get them on board. Dr. Stalker said his recommendation would be to focus solely on the sediment issue and not raise the issue of the spoil site's capacity so as not to stir up unnecessary trouble. Capt. Suber said the City's Military and Veterans Affairs Director could be a good point of contact to reach the local Marine Corps commander. Mr. Hoyles suggested focusing on the Marine Corps and not dealing with the Army Corps of Engineers for the time being. A friendly meeting with the Marine Corps to show them the study proposal and get their buy-in would be a good first step. The first phase of the study – identifying the source of the material – is inexpensive compared to removing the shoal material in a later phase. He said the Marine Corps may have a vested interest in promoting the success of this project because they have to keep sufficient depth in the basin to get their fully loaded ships in and out at any tide condition. If the source of the shoaling material can be identified, then it can be remediated and the Marine Corps may need to do less dredging at their facility.

Council Member Gay said he would work on getting the local base commanders to a meeting along with representatives of the local congressmen to open a conversation about this issue. He will schedule the next meeting based on their availability. Commissioner Hardesty said several meetings with a variety of federal agencies have been held in the past, some contentious and some friendly, but all have come to the same result which is no action. Mr. Gay said he believes the mayor's administration will be cooperative to help resolve the problem. Dr. Pinto said it could be considered a resiliency issue as well. Mr. Hoyles suggested getting the City's Chief Resiliency Officer, Anne Coglianesse, involved when the time is right. Commissioner Devereaux asked if it would be possible to get a copy of the ACOE's current contract with the dredging company to see if there is a liability clause that would make it the dredger's responsibility to fix this problem, which might thereby get the Corps of Engineers off the hook for paying for the dredging needed to remove the material. He said the problem has exploded in the last 3 years which could be because the spoil site is now full and now overflowing sediment, which is leading to the shoaling.

Public Comment

None

Next Meeting

At the call of the Chair.

Meeting adjourned: 10:48 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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10.26.23 Posted 8:30 a.m.