

City of Jacksonville

117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 16, 2023

1:00 PM

Council Chamber
1st Floor, City Hall

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

CM Jimmy Peluso, Chair

CM Mike Gay, Vice Chair

CM Tyrona Clark-Murray

CM Ken Amaro, Alternate

Jon Michael Barker

Robert Birtalan

Lane Burnett, Excused Absence

Representative Kiyon Michael, Excused Absence

Mark Devereaux, Excused Absence

Andrew Fraden

Marc Hardesty, Absent

Richard Hartley

Richard J. Redick

Jill Haskell - General Public Rep.

Vacant, Ex-Officio

Adam Hoyles, Ex-Officio

Barbara Ireland Hobson & Rebecca Bolton, Legislative Assistants

Rita Mairs, Office of General Counsel

Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University

Jeff Clements, Chief of Research

Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator

1. Call To Order**2. Rollcall**

Rollcall

Present 10 - Commissioner Jon Michael Barker, Commissioner Robert Birtalan, Ex-Officio Adam Hoyles, Commissioner Andrew Fraden, Commissioner Richard Hartley, Commissioner Tyrone Clark-Murray, Commissioner Richard Redick, Commissioner Jill Haskell, Chair Jimmy Peluso, and Vice Chair Mike Gay

Excused 3 - Commissioner Kiyon Michael, Commissioner Mark Devereaux, and Commissioner Lane Burnett

Absent 1 - Commissioner Marc Hardesty

3. Approval of Minutes**4. Pledge of Allegiance****5. St. Johns River Status Report on Water Quality & Manatees**

Dr. Gerry Pinto of the Jacksonville University Marine Science Research Institute presented information about water temperature, salinity and water levels at several gauging stations on the river. There are presently no algae blooms, which is to be expected given the cooler temperatures. The area is in a rain deficit for the year (almost 2 inches) despite the rain in the last couple of days. A manatee reconnaissance flight taken at the end of October spotted 7 manatees in the city, all of whom should be leaving the area shortly as the weather cools. There were no new fatalities since last month, leaving 15 deaths for the year, 6 due to boat strikes. Chairman Peluso asked about the effect of heavy rains on water quality. Dr. Pinto said that heavy rains will always wash nutrients into the river, which are more noticeable in the summer because those nutrients tend to cause visible algae blooms in warm water.

6. Old Business**a. St. John's River Shoaling Task Force Update**

Council Member Gay said the task force was under the impression at its last meeting that the Army Corps of Engineers would not be dredging around Blount Island this year on its usual bi-annual schedule, but that has turned out not to be the case. A contractor has begun mobilizing to dredge the area. He has talked with the administration about funding for the JU study of the shoal as previously discussed and they are looking for a funding source. The next step would be to meet with the commanders of the Marine Corps facility on Blount Island and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) about the shoal problem and the proposed study. Council Member Gay asked for a copy of the latest draft of the JU study proposal and cost estimates. Rita Mairs of the Office of General Counsel suggested that the proposal be in final form rather than a draft. Jill Haskell asked for clarification of who would be doing the study; Ms. Mairs said it would be done by Jacksonville University, not by the Army Corps of Engineers as discussed at previous meetings some time ago. Capt. Suber said that dredging permits will be needed through the ACOE, but the actual dredging will be done by a private contractor working for the Marine Corps. Ms. Haskell asked if the JU study data would be deemed scientifically sufficient to prove the source of the spoil material and was told that it would.

Commissioner Birtalan said the JU study will be faster and less expensive than the Corps of Engineers' proposal and will have the added benefit of creating new educational opportunities for JU students and the Marine Science Research Institute. Commissioner Barker said he believes from prior correspondence that the ACOE was willing to be cooperative with a study of the problem. Ms. Mairs said that the OGC's communication with the ACOE found them to be less than cooperative, possibly because of the suspicion of possible legal action resulting from the study's findings. Capt. Suber said the approvals and permits to place the marker buoys around the shoal are underway and should be in hand soon. The City has a contractor ready to do the work when the permits are received. Commissioner Barker suggested approaching the ACOE from the perspective that the City is already spending its own money to mark the shoal and pay for the JU study and is simply asking for their cooperation in fixing the problem when the source is identified. CM Gay said he will communicate with the Congressional delegation when he has the JU study proposal in hand to seek their support.

Commissioner Reddick asked if the Waterways Commission has any authority over or participation in the Mayport Docks construction project. Capt. Suber said the Commission has the same advisory ability that it has over anything that happens on the waterways.

b. FIND Subcommittee Report

Brian Burkett, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, reported that the subcommittee met on October 25th to review the staff recommendations for FIND projects for next year. The subcommittee approved the staff's three recommendations: 1) Mike McCue Boat Ramp Bulkhead construction phase - \$1,600,000 FIND/\$3,520,000 total cost; 2) Blue Cypress Park Fishing Pier replacement construction phase - \$575,000 FIND/\$1,265,000 total cost; 3) Wayne B. Stevens Boat Ramp Improvements design phase - \$75,000 FIND/\$165,000. The City expects to receive approximately \$2 million from FIND for next year and is requesting slightly more than that in hopes of getting the full cost awarded. Should the full amount of all 3 projects not be awarded, the Wayne B. Stevens Boat Ramp design project would be withdrawn. Mr. Hartley asked what material will be used to replace the Blue Cypress Pier and whether it will be concrete to avoid the problem with deterioration demonstrated by the current wood pilings. Mr. Burkett said wood pilings typically last about 25-30 years, which is the expected lifespan of the entire structure before it needs a substantial rebuild. The extra cost of concrete pilings may not be justified for that lifespan.

Chairman Peluso introduced Jack Meeks, the Planning Commission's new liaison to the Waterways Commission, in attendance at the meeting.

Public Participation

John Nooney said that public access to waterways is sadly lacking and the proposed FIND projects, which are worthwhile, are not adding anything to that insufficient access.

Motion (Barker/2nd Birtalan) – approve the departmental recommendations for three FIND projects – approved unanimously.

Commissioner Barker asked about the status of the Ortega River anchorage zone warning signage and enforcement of the anchoring limitations. Capt. Suber said he understood from the Sheriff's Office that the new sheriff's administration was looking at that issue among many others. Mr. Barker suggested arranging a noticed meeting of several commissioners with representatives of JSO to discuss the history of the problem and the Waterways Commission's past work and recommendations.

7. Public Comment

John Nooney advocated for a kayak launch on Pottsburg Creek near his home. He said that fishing is now allowed downtown, despite what the posted signs say.

The Chair announced that the Waterways Commission's River Accord Task Force meeting scheduled for November 22nd has been moved up to 11:00 a.m. from the originally announced time of 1:00 p.m. The group will look at the history of the River Accord, what it accomplished, and lessons learned.

The Commission's next meeting will be on December 14th.

8. Adjournment

Pursuant to the American with Disabilities Act, accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. Please allow 1-2 business days notification to process; last minute requests will be accepted; but may not be possible to fulfill. Please contact Disabled Services Division at: V 904-255-5466, TTY-904-255-5476, or email your request to KaraT@coj.net.

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Posted 11.17.23 3:00 p.m.