

City of Jacksonville

*117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202*



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 10, 2025

2:00 PM

**Council Chamber,
1st Floor, City Hall**

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

CM Mike Gay, Chair

CM Ken Amaro, Vice Chair

CM Jimmy Peluso

CM Tyrona Clark-Murray, Alternate

Jon Michael Barker

Robert Birtalan

General Public Rep - Vacant

Representative Kiyan Michael - Excused

Mark Devereaux

Andrew Fraden

Marc Hardesty

Richard Hartley - Excused

Richard J. Redick

Jill Haskell - General Public Rep

Jack Meeks, Ex-Officio

Adam Hoyles, Ex-Officio

Rebecca Bolton, Legislative Assistant

Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Counsel

Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University

Nayeli Jimenez, Council Research

Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator

Meeting Convened: 2:04 PM**Meeting Adjourned: 3:12 PM**

- 1. Call To Order**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Mike Gay called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees to the Waterways Commission meeting. Members introduced themselves and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

- 4. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the March meeting were unanimously approved by voice vote.

Commissioner Adam Hoyles provided an update on a potential public access project for a kayak launch along the Ortega River. He explained that the idea originated from personal and professional interest and had been discussed informally with others involved in the FIND Committee. He identified two possible locations for the launch. The first location is near Collins Avenue, where it crosses the Ortega River. The area is heavily forested floodplain and is owned by the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT), which purchased the 80-acre tract to prevent development. Mr. Hoyles noted that while the location is ideal from an environmental and recreational standpoint, it poses significant logistical and financial challenges due to access and limited space for parking. The second location is at the intersection of Argyle Forest Boulevard and Blanding Boulevard, just south of the Navy base. Mr. Hoyles described this site as the one he personally uses, and parking in the nearby shopping center. While not a formal launch area, he has seen other kayakers and fishermen use the location. He emphasized that it is not ideal from a safety standpoint, but its proximity to the river and existing parking make it a viable option. Mr. Hoyles noted that the adjacent floodplain is now owned by Lamar Advertising, who recently acquired it from a private owner. Mr. Hoyles reported that Lamar Advertising is open to working with the City and has no objections to the site being used for public access, but a formal agreement would be needed. One complication, according to Mr. Hoyles, is that the City would need to own the property to invest FIND dollars. While Lamar Advertising controls part of the land, the shopping center parking lot is owned by a separate LLC with an address traced to a Ford dealership in Sarasota.

Commissioner Jon Barker responded that he had spoken with representatives from NFLT, and they are willing to assist in any way they can. He also spoke with Brian Burkett and clarified that while ownership of the property is preferred, a long-term lease, such as a 99-year lease could meet the requirement. Mr. Barker noted that there is precedent for such agreements.

Mr. Hoyles added that Lamar Advertising had expressed no interest in owning the land, stating their only desire was to retain the billboard and avoid the liability of the surrounding property. They would not oppose either a sale or a lease arrangement with the City.

Mr. Barker clarified he had been referring to the shopping center parking area as the key hurdle and stated that a lease with capital value for that space would be ideal. He also offered to assist Mr. Hoyles in discussions between NFLT and Lamar Advertising if needed.

Chair Gay asked for clarification on the location of the site. Mr. Hoyles responded that it is located at the intersection of Argyle Forest Boulevard and Blanding Boulevard, just south of the Navy base. He added that it's the farthest point upstream on the Ortega River with reasonably navigable water, beyond which it becomes dense forest.

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

Dr. Pinto reported that current conditions on the St. Johns River are stable and within normal seasonal expectations. Water temperatures are ranging between 75 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Salinity levels remain high but are considered typical for this time of year: Mayport: 23 to 33 parts per thousand, Dames Point Bridge: 13 to 21 parts per thousand, Jacksonville University (JU): 15 to 18 parts per thousand, Downtown: 7 to 10 parts per thousand, Buckman Bridge: 1 to 4 parts per thousand. Water levels are stable with no significant changes, despite some recent light rainfall. There have been no reports of harmful algae blooms or toxins. Mixed algae were observed, but none of concern at this time. One perinatal manatee death was reported near Big Fishweir Creek by the Herschel Street Bridge. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) was notified but could not determine a cause of death due to the level of decomposition. An additional manatee mortality occurred in Clay County near the Cross Florida Barge Canal lock, where the animal was crushed, an occasional but known risk at that site. Aerial manatee survey flights were delayed last month due to aircraft issues but are expected to resume this month. Although the water temperature remains slightly low for a full manatee return, initial sightings are starting to come in. Dr. Pinto reminded commissioners and the public of Jacksonville University's online manatee sighting portal, accessible via QR code. He encouraged users to continue submitting sightings and provide feedback on the system's usability.

6. Public Comment

Elizabeth Filippelli urged against shrimp harvesting in Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve due to its ecological importance.

7. Pumpkin Hill Creek/ Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park Issue of Recreational & Commercial Shrimp Harvesting

Erica Burgess, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission explained proposed rule changes affecting shrimping in Nassau and Duval counties. She began by providing an overview of shrimping in Florida. There are four species of shrimp harvested in the state, but in Nassau and Duval counties, the primary species is white shrimp. These shrimp are used for both food and bait. They are considered an annual crop due to their short lifespan. Adult white shrimp spend most of their lives in estuaries and migrate offshore to spawn between April and October. After hatching, larval shrimp move quickly back to the estuaries to grow and mature. She stated that both recreational and commercial shrimping take place in this region. Recreational shrimpers typically use cast nets. Commercial shrimpers are subject to vessel and gear restrictions. In Duval County, inshore shrimp vessels must be less than thirty-five feet in length. In Nassau County, the limit is forty-five feet. Live bait shrimpers generally use skiffs or small trawlers, while food shrimpers use cabin-style trawlers and otter trawls. These vessels operate mainly in the St. Johns and Nassau rivers.

She reviewed existing regulations in the region. There is a seasonal closure in place from April through May. Some areas remain closed year-round to protect nursery grounds, as shown on a map shared during the presentation. Trawling is prohibited south of the Acosta Bridge in the St. Johns River. Commercial shrimping is not allowed on weekends or holidays in order to reduce conflicts with recreational users. There are no size limits for shrimp. Recreational anglers are limited to five gallons of shrimp per person or vessel. Commercial food shrimpers are not subject to harvest limits, but live bait shrimpers in Nassau and Duval counties are limited to one gallon of dead shrimp. Commercial shrimpers must have proper licenses and endorsements. She then explained two proposed changes. The first proposal would increase the dead shrimp allowance for commercial live bait shrimpers in Nassau and Duval counties from one gallon to five gallons, which would bring the region in line with the rest of the state. Currently, live bait shrimpers in these counties must discard dead shrimp, resulting in waste. Allowing five gallons of dead shrimp to be kept is not expected to increase overall harvest because dead shrimp are incidental, not the goal of the live bait operation. The change aims to reduce waste while maintaining incentives to keep shrimp alive. The second proposal involves seasonally opening a section of Pumpkin Hill Creek to shrimping. This area, along with ten others, has been closed since the mid-nineties to protect nursery habitat and reduce bycatch. The proposed change would allow shrimp harvest in this specific stretch of Pumpkin Hill Creek, from the Nassau River to Tiger Point, between September and December. The opening would apply to both recreational and commercial shrimpers. FWC's surveys show that juvenile shrimp tend to concentrate farther up the creek beyond Tiger Point, so the proposed opening is believed to avoid the areas with the highest concentrations of young shrimp. The goal of this change is to expand shrimping opportunities in the region while maintaining protection of important nursery habitat.

Ms. Burgess stated that public input is still being gathered. Comments may be submitted online, by phone, or by email. She also noted that the Jacksonville City Council has passed a resolution opposing the Pumpkin Hill Creek proposal. Additionally, staff from the National Park Service at Timucuan Preserve have voiced opposition. As a result, FWC is currently reexamining the proposal and will take all comments and concerns into account before presenting a final recommendation to the commission later this year. She invited members of the public to continue submitting comments and provided information on how to do so through the FWC website or by emailing the agency directly.

Council Member Peluso began by expressing appreciation for FWC's reconsideration of the Pumpkin Hill proposal. He emphasized that although his district is not directly impacted, he and other Jacksonville officials are united in opposing the proposed changes and wish to support their colleagues and constituents in the affected areas.

Commissioner Fraden asked what the burden was for commercial shrimpers. Ms. Burgess responded

that the burdens cited by shrimpers included having to travel far distances to access open shrimping areas and being required to discard dead shrimp due to a one-gallon restriction in Duval and Nassau counties, while other parts of the state allow five gallons.

Commissioner Fraden asked whether the two issues, raising the dead shrimp allowance and opening Pumpkin Hill Creek could be considered separately. Ms. Burgess confirmed that they could.

Commissioner Hardesty noted that five gallons is not a significant quantity of shrimp and is equivalent to the recreational cast net limit. However, he questioned why FWC held the initial meeting about this matter in Volusia County when the impacted region is Duval and Nassau. Ms. Burgess explained that the commission meeting was a statewide event where public comment was accepted on any topic. The shrimpers from Northeast Florida used that forum to raise the issue. She added that subsequent workshops were held locally in Oceanway, Mayport, and at the Jacksonville Public Library.

Commissioner Hoyles supported the proposal to increase the dead shrimp allowance, noting it would reduce waste. However, he expressed concern about bycatch from trawling in Pumpkin Hill Creek, a sensitive ecological area.

Commissioner Redick asked if an economic impact analysis had been conducted. Ms. Burgess replied that no economic analysis had been performed, explaining that the anticipated impact did not meet the state threshold that would trigger such a study. Commissioner Redick voiced concern about evaluating risks and benefits without such analysis.

Commissioner Hardesty asked what the primary driver for the proposed changes was if not economics. Ms. Burgess said the purpose was to increase access and reduce travel time for shrimpers. Commissioner Hardesty followed up with a question to Dr. Pinto of Jacksonville University, asking whether any studies had been done in the area. Dr. Pinto said JU had not conducted any studies on the proposed area.

Commissioner Hardesty noted the challenges local shrimpers face in securing live bait and the growing distance they must travel, often to Georgia or the Gulf, due to closures in Northeast Florida. He stressed that the area's live bait shrimping sector is small and questioned whether a limited reopening of Pumpkin Hill Creek would have a meaningful environmental impact.

Commissioner Barker clarified that the rule change appears aimed specifically at alleviating the shortage of live shrimp rather than food shrimp. Ms. Burgess confirmed that most inshore shrimp, regardless of harvester type, are ultimately used for bait, not food.

Captain Suber asked what the state's economic impact threshold was to trigger a formal analysis. Ms. Burgess said she could follow up with a specific figure but believed it was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. He asked whether shrimp harvested in Pumpkin Hill Creek ultimately migrate into the Nassau River and whether the proposed opening would increase shrimping activity or attract new vessels. Ms. Burgess explained that it would not increase the number of shrimp but would create a new legal harvest area. She could not predict whether new harvesters would enter the fishery but said participation currently stands at ten or fewer.

Commissioner Haskell asked Captain Suber whether allowing commercial vessels in Pumpkin Hill would affect recreational paddlers. Captain Suber confirmed that adding motorized traffic would create user conflicts in a preserve that is heavily used for kayaking and paddleboarding.

Commissioner Barker asked whether the FWC could allow recreational shrimping but not commercial shrimping in Pumpkin Hill. Ms. Burgess responded that such a distinction was possible.

Commissioner Fraden asked if there is typically a shortage of live shrimp in bait shops during the fall. Ms. Burgess said she could not answer definitively.

Chair Gay thanked FWC for their presentation and said that although he supports local businesses, the fact remains that Pumpkin Hill is a designated preserve. He attended the recent FWC meeting in

Mayport and counted five to six shrimpers interested in entering that narrow, shallow waterway. He expressed concern about cumulative stress on the preserve and its resources, including oyster beds and nearby residential areas. He asked if any other areas in the region had been considered for opening instead. Ms. Burgess said the only request they received from stakeholders was for Pumpkin Hill Creek. Chair Gay encouraged FWC to explore alternative areas that are not designated preserves and said more evaluation was needed before making a decision. He emphasized the importance of protecting a long-standing preserve and warned against creating a precedent that could weaken its status.

Councilman Amaro questioned whether all stakeholders were properly engaged. He also asked about FWC's timeline. Ms. Burgess replied that the original timeline aimed for a May vote, but that timeline has now been postponed indefinitely.

Commissioner Barker reminded everyone of the history behind the establishment of Pumpkin Hill as a preserve. He described how the community worked for years to protect the area and resisted piecemeal development. He cautioned against undermining that legacy and urged FWC to ensure the original vision for the preserve is respected.

8. New Business

2025-0166 ORD Adopting a Small-Scale Amendmnt to the FLUM Series of the 2045 Comp Plan at 5355 Pickettville Rd, East of Old Kings Rd - (15.87± Acres) - LDR to LI - Smart & Son Investments, LLC (R.E. # 042197-0020) (Appl # L-5998-24C) (Dist. 10-Pittman) (Roberts) (LUZ) (PD & PC Apv) (JWC Apv) (Rezoning 2025-167)
3/11/25 CO Introduced: LUZ, JWC
3/18/25 LUZ Read 2nd & Rerefer
3/25/25 CO Read 2nd & Rerefer
4/8/25 CO PH Addnt'l 4/22/25
LUZ PH - 4/15/25
Public Hearing Pursuant to Sec 163.3187, F.S. & Ch 650, Pt 4, Ord Code - 4/8/25 & 4/22/25

Ed Lukacovic, Planning Department presented Small Scale Land Use Amendment L-5998-24C, associated with Ordinance 2025-166. The ordinance concerns a proposed change in land use for the property located at 5355 Pickettville Road, covering 15.87 acres, including 1.57 acres of wetlands classified as Category II. The site is currently designated for low-density residential use, and the proposed change is to light industrial. Mr. Lukacovic noted the property lies within the Six Mile Creek and Ribault River sub-drainage basins, and is surrounded by varied land uses including residential, public facilities, light and high industrial, and a cemetery directly to the south. A portion of the site borders Six Mile Creek. Existing flood zone and elevation maps indicate over 10 acres fall within the AE 100-year flood zone. Additional mapping identified the area as vulnerable in both hurricane storm surge and 500-year flood conditions. The area is also within the Industrial Situational Compatibility Zone, which suggests the area is appropriate for industrial development due to surrounding uses. Mr. Lukacovic stated that a 100-foot buffer is required when industrial property abuts residential land. The wetlands along Six Mile Creek fall within that buffer and cannot be developed. Elevation and soils maps indicate the land drops from 17 feet above sea level near Pickettville Road to about 2 to 4 feet at the creek.

Council Member Amaro asked what the intended purpose of the property would be following the zoning change. Mr. Sittner explained that the current owner does not have a specific development plan but intends to market the land once entitled. The anticipated use could be truck parking or storage, given similar nearby uses. He added that the companion zoning application is for conventional light industrial, allowing a broad range of permitted uses.

Chairman Gay asked for clarification about the classification of the wetlands. Mr. Lukacovic confirmed they are Category II wetlands because they buffer a creek. Chairman Gay also asked about potential mitigation if the wetlands were encroached upon, and Mr. Lukacovic explained that mitigation would be required by law if any disturbance occurs. He reiterated that the classification remains Category II, and that any development within the buffer would need to meet mitigation requirements.

Commissioner Fraden expressed concern about the mention of truck storage and asked whether a retention pond would be required to prevent runoff from contaminating nearby wetlands. Mr. Lukacovic explained that if impervious surfaces such as pavement were introduced, a stormwater control system would be required. He added that even if the land were left as dirt, the conversion from wooded or grassy land to dirt could increase runoff, and in his professional opinion, a stormwater system such as a pond or grass buffer should still be implemented.

9. Old Business**a. St. Johns River Accord Task Force**

Chair Gay stated that there were no updates on the River Accord Task Force.

b. Shoaling and Artificial Reef Task Force

Chair Gay stated that there were no updates and it was still in progress on the Shoaling and Artificial Reef Task Force but thanked everyone's hard work on these efforts.

10. Adjournment

Chair Gay adjourned the meeting.

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.

Minutes: Nayeli Jimenez- Council Research Division

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Posted: 04/11/2025 5:00 PM