

City of Jacksonville

*117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202*



Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 15, 2025

9:30 AM

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

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

*CM Ken Amaro, Chair
CM Mike Gay, Vice Chair
CM Jimmy Peluso
CM Matt Carlucci, Alternate
Jon Michael Barker
Robert Birtalan
General Public Rep - Vacant
Representative Kiyan Michael - Excused
Mark Devereaux
Andrew Fraden
Marc Hardesty
Richard Hartley - Late Arrival
General Public Rep - Vacant
Jill Haskell - General Public Rep
Charles Garrison, Ex-Officio
Adam Hoyles, Ex-Officio*

*Barbara Ireland Hobson, Legislative Assistant II
Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Counsel
Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University
Brandon Russell, Council Research
Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator*

1. Meeting Convened: 9:30 AM Meeting Adjourned: 10:08 AM

2. Roll Call

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Ken Amaro called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. Members introduced themselves and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Approval of Minutes

Approval of the minutes from the September 10, 2025, meeting was moved and seconded. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes via voice vote.

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

Dr. Pinto reported very high water levels and high tides. He stated salinity levels are lower than normal but were not unusual. Water temperature was reported at around 76°F, a decrease from the prior month. Salinity at Mayport is reported around 20-27 parts per thousand (ppt), Dames Point is at 15-20 ppt, JU is at 10-13 ppt, and Buckman Bridge is at around three ppt, despite a normal measure of 0.3 ppt. He added that rainfall was below normal for this time of year, and the whole basin is running at a deficit of around 5 inches.

Dr. Pinto stated that cooler temperatures are helping with harmful algae. He said that mostly mixed algae were found at Arlington, Downtown, and Mandarin Point, with no toxins observed. Some species were detected that produce low levels of toxins, though not at concerning levels. Doctors Lake has a couple of different species of algae present that also produce low levels of toxins. Shands Bridge also shows some algae but again with low levels of toxins.

There were no changes in the number of local manatee deaths since the last meeting. Statewide, there have been 86 watercraft-related manatee deaths, bringing the total to 558. Dr. Pinto stated that it was about 100 more than at this time last year. He said there are 14 manatees in the area based on his measurements, but he has had calls from people reporting other manatees. Most of them are moving south, but he added that some may stay behind if the weather remains warm throughout the fall and winter.

Adam Hoyles asked how we got lucky with the algae this year and asked what the manatees were eating since much of the grass beds have been wiped out. Dr. Pinto stated that some grass beds were recovering and that the manatees were eating those. He added that tape grass beds were the ones wiped out and that manatees will eat any of the 12-14 species of grass found in the river. He said it was difficult to pinpoint why algae was low because it's a dynamic system. Though rainfall can lead to big blooms, it also depends on residence time, or how quickly water is moving in and out of the river. He also stated that intermittent rainfall with dry spells can lead to increased salinity, which kills the freshwater algae.

Chair Amaro asked for an explanation of the high salinity levels at the Buckman Bridge. Dr. Pinto stated that the elevated salinity was not significant, as 0-5 ppt is typical for that area. Chair Amaro then asked how to address the uptick in manatee deaths due to watercraft. Dr. Pinto clarified that the increase in deaths is reflected in statewide numbers due to incidents in the southern part of the state.

6. Public Comment

John Nooney spoke on 2025-0749 and 2025-0727 and asked why they were not before the Waterways Commission.

Latrese Bell spoke about regaining access to the George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier, asking what happened to money intended to repair the pier on the Duval County side.

7. New Business

Council Member Peluso - Presentation of Gift of Appreciation to Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Council, thanking her for all of her time and effort in drafting Chapter 388 Legislation.

8. Old Business

Shad Creek Resolution

George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park

CM Gay did not have any new updates for the George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier and added that local state representatives were going back to Tallahassee to get updates. He stated dissatisfaction with the status of the problem and will still be looking for solutions.

CM Gay invited Brian Burket, Waterfront Project Manager, to the podium. CM Gay stated that Ms. MacGillis, Office of General Counsel, has prepared legislation to address issues along Shad Creek. He added that when FDOT reconstructed the bridge, they did not conduct a vessel impact survey. He said that because the bridge is now higher, large vessels can pass through the creek with a larger wake. He said they hope to eventually send the resolution to FWC to get no-wake zones in the area, potentially.

Ms. MacGillis stated that Colleen Hampsey, Council Research, drafted a resolution. She said the Commission could approve the substance of the proposed resolution to allow for specific language to be pinned down. She stated there would be a series of whereas clauses that explain the Shad Creek bridge reconstruction and the role of the JWC. She also described potential clauses explaining that a proper vessel impact study was not completed and describing the impact on wildlife, property, and other structures along the creek due to increased large vessel traffic. She said one outstanding policy decision would be to finalize the location of the proposed no-wake zones.

Jim Suber stated that terminology needs to be corrected to "slow-speed minimum wake zone" rather than a "no-wake zone," clarifying that all boats leave a wake while moving. Mr. Burket provided background on the map, stating that the red dashed area is the 300-foot zone on either side of the bridge that was approved in 2019. He added that they are now asking for an expansion of that zone. He expects the resolution to request FWC to accept an application to request expansion.

Chair Amaro asked if they were in a better position to accept the application than in the past. Mr. Burket said he thought they were in a better position to have FWC look favorably on the request. He added that the yellow lines on the map show the new zones based on recommendations from the neighborhoods in the area.

Richard Hartley asked if there was some documentation of broad neighborhood support for this action. Mr. Burket said there have been a series of meetings, but he did not know if there was a resolution or some other statement of support. CM Gay stated there wasn't a neighborhood association pushing the expanded zones, but he said that there were multiple people in the area who had reached out with frustrations. Mr. Hartley stated there should be solicitation of comments from the homeowners regarding the matter. CM Gay stated that it was doable and did not anticipate much resistance. Chair Amaro asked if community input would be a required part of the application process. Mr. Burket stated that community input was a required part of the FWC application process and that FWC had the right to conduct its own public meeting.

Andrew Fraden asked if the homeowners could go straight to FWC with the request. Mr. Burket said that he thinks they would have to go through the municipality. Mr. Suber affirmed and added that while anyone can go to the FWC with their issues, the municipality will still have to be involved in the process.

Jon Michael Barker asked if there was a manatee consideration and then asked if there was a homeowner impact statement. He also stated he was not sure that he agreed with expanding the zone if there was no substantial proof of negative impacts. He also asked if there was a measure of how many boats move through the area. Mr. Suber explained that the area is a cut-through to the estuary and the intercoastal waterway, and on a typical day, traffic is low, but he said that when there are tournaments or other events, traffic can be heavier with people traveling faster. He added that because the creek is so

narrow, the current can be swift and the wakes from boats can damage docks and other private property.

CM Gay stated that when boats slow down at the start of the low wake zone, it can cause a larger thrust of water that can be damaging or threaten the safety of other boaters. He reiterated that there were things not considered by FDOT that should have been when reconstructing the bridge. He also said that the FWC does not take into consideration damage to bulkheads and other property when looking to implement minimum wake zones. He also stated that to consider the manatee factors, there had to be documented manatee activity over time.

Robert Birtalan added that because of the strong current, boats sometimes are required to hit a speed fast enough to move forward, making large wakes hard to avoid. Mr. Suber asked Mr. Burket if the area's inclusion in the Timucuan Preserve was a mitigating factor. Mr. Burket said he was not certain and noted the area was within the aquatic preserve boundary, too.

CM Gay said he met with the State Parks, which are looking to implement some minimum wake zones within their boundaries as well. CM Peluso asked for a summary of what was being discussed. Ms. MacGillis stated that there was a resolution in concept but not a draft yet. She added that there were additional issues and potential stakeholders who could get on board with the resolution. She recommended changing the tone of the potential resolution from a firm demand to a request for consideration of the changes. She recommended some memorialization of public sentiment and indicated that the resolution needed some more work.

9. Subcommittees & Task Forces - Updates

FIND Subcommittee - Meeting Reminder - Tuesday, October 22, 2025, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m., Lynwood Roberts Room

Chair Amaro reminded the Commission of the FIND Subcommittee meeting on October 22, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.

Shoaling & Artificial Reef Task Force

Speaking on the Shoaling and Artificial Reef Task Force, CM Peluso stated that the state legislature meets in January and is about to begin committee weeks. He said it was his understanding that Rep. Kiyon Michaels, who represents the Beaches, may be a good person to reach out to about direct appropriations since she is a member of JWC and represents the Beaches. Chair Amaro asked who should reach out to her. CM Peluso stated that organizations or anyone interested in the topic should reach out to her office.

River Accord Task Force

CM Peluso stated it was his understanding that the River Accords task force was disbanded because there wasn't much more action to take.

Derelict Vessel Task Force

Mr. Barker stated they were waiting to hear back from the Environmental Protection Board regarding implementation. Ms. MacGillis said she had a conversation with Mr. Richardson regarding the draft of rules sent to EBP, which is on track, and indicated that funding remains an issue. She also mentioned a potential mock derelict vessel taking to prepare for takings in the future.

10. Reminder: the November Jacksonville Waterways Commission Meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 12, 2025, in the Lynwood Roberts Room at 9:30 a.m.

11. 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.

Minutes: Brandon Russell, Council Research

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Posted: 10/17/25, 1:30 p.m.