

City of Jacksonville

*117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202*



Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 17, 2026

11:00 AM

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

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

CM Rahman Johnson, Chair

CM Mike Gay, Vice Chair

CM Jimmy Peluso

CM Matt Carlucci, Alternate

Jon Michael Barker - Excused

Robert Birtalan - Excused

J. Hobson

Rep. Dean Black - Excused

Mark Devereaux - Excused

Andrew Fraden

Marc Hardesty

Matt Jones

Scott Thomas

General Public Rep - Vacant

D. R. Repass, Planning Commission

Adam Hoyles, Environmental Protection Board

Rebecca Bolton, Legislative Assistant II

Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Counsel

Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University

Steven Libby, Council Research

Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator

1. Call To Order

Chair Johnson convened the meeting at 11:05 a.m.

2. Attendance**3. Pledge of Allegiance****4. Approval of Minutes**

A motion to approve the minutes of the August 28, 2026 meeting was made and seconded. Chair Johnson announced for the record that the agenda had been taken out of order at the last meeting because of Dr. Pinto's absence, and that the minutes should reflect that order. The minutes were approved without objection.

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

Dr. Gerard Pinto, Jacksonville University, explained that rainfall in the area is approximately 4 to 5 inches below normal for the year, which is increasing salinity levels, and that the area remains in drought conditions. He stated that Mayport currently has salinity of 25 to 30 ppt, while normal seawater is 35 ppt, which makes salinity levels at Mayport slightly below average. He then stated that JU and the Dames Point Bridge currently have salinity of 13 to 18 ppt, which are expected levels with brackish conditions. He stated that Downtown and the Buckman Bridge are slightly elevated, with 11 to 15 ppt for Downtown and 6 to 8 ppt for the Buckman Bridge.

Dr. Pinto stated that he conducted a manatee survey last week and found 7 to 8 manatees in the area, with most of them past the Buckman Bridge toward the St. Johns and Putnam county border. He added that many dolphins were noticed around NAS Jacksonville, likely because of the elevated salinity levels in the area. Dr. Pinto explained that Jacksonville International shows a rainfall deficit of 4 inches for the year, while SJRWMD, which covers the entire basin, shows a rainfall deficit of 8 inches for the year.

Dr. Pinto explained that there is a substantial amount of algae in the area and that Doctors Lake was covered in algae. He added that he is unsure whether the algae are producing toxins. He stated that the most recent sampling by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, conducted on September 8, showed that Microcystis is present around Doctors Lake and the Shands Bridge, but that it was not producing toxins. Dr. Pinto stated that there will likely be an in-house sampling.

Dr. Pinto stated that last month there was red tide in the Fort George inlet, which is an unusual event for the area but is caused by high temperatures, rainfall, and nutrients that feed the algae. He added that the Health Department released an advisory warning because red tide produces a neurotoxin that is dangerous to humans, animals, and fish. He stated that he did not see any large-scale fish kills or any fish kills from the red tide.

Dr. Pinto stated that there was one manatee mortality in August in Little Pottsburg Creek, and that there have been 16 total manatee mortalities this year, with 4 from watercraft and 3 from canal lock. Dr. Pinto reviewed the manatee aerial sightings map and explained that manatees start to leave the area as the hours of daylight decrease.

Mr. Matt Jones asked for the status of the Queens Harbor canal lock. Dr. Pinto reported that the manager of the Queens Harbor canal lock believes that the manatees died in the Intracoastal Waterway and washed into the lock rather than having been killed by the lock, disputing the state's findings. Dr. Pinto added that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a federal agency, is trying to determine whether there is inexpensive retrofitting that can be done to prevent incidents.

Mr. Andrew Fraden asked for the cause of the recurrence of algae blooms in Doctors Lake. Dr. Pinto stated that Doctors Lake is a closed system compared to the river, which flows slowly. He added that residents around Doctors Lake are fertilizing their yards, and that nutrients run off into the lake from rain, which increases algae blooms.

Chair Johnson asked whether there is anything that could be done to mitigate the salinity levels and algae blooms. Dr. Pinto explained that the algae producing toxins are freshwater algae and that when salinity levels rise, the rising salinity kills the algae. He added that algae are also fed by nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, from people fertilizing during the spring and summer. He stated that

buffers can be added along shorelines to capture runoff, and that the City's ordinance regarding fertilizing can be followed.

Chair Johnson asked whether algae blooms adversely affect manatees. Dr. Pinto stated that the presence of algae blooms does not seem to affect manatees. He added that when he sees algae blooms, he does not see manatees, and explained that manatees know to avoid areas with algae blooms. Dr. Pinto stated that toxins can be left behind when algae blooms die, but that he has not seen any manatees die or have problems from those toxins. He added that manatee deaths and health problems from algae toxins are attributable to red tide, but that it is more of a problem in southwest Florida. He stated that this is why he was concerned about the occurrence of red tide in the area.

6. Public Comment

Mr. John Nooney spoke on FIND and JWC.

Ms. Leatrice Bell thanked the Commission for its continued attention to the George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier issue.

Chair Johnson commended Ms. Bell for her continued advocacy on the issue.

CM Gay commended Ms. Bell for her continued advocacy on the issue and added that he is continuing to hold meetings with Mr. Brian Burket, Parks Department, on the issue, and that he is exploring grant options while working with the state. CM Gay encouraged advocates to appear at the November Duval Delegation meeting and raise the issue. Chair Johnson explained that they have looked into using Community Benefits Agreement funds on the project, but that OGC has advised them against using the funds for that purpose. Chair Johnson encouraged the community to propose ideas to the Commission and stated that they would consider those ideas so that the bridge can reopen.

7. New Business

2026-0648 ORD Transmitting to the State of FL's Various Agencies for Review, a Proposed Large-Scale Revision to the FLUM Series of the 2045 Comp Plan at 0 Garden St, 9800 Plummer Rd, 0 Messer Rd, 0 Kings Crossing Dr, and 0 Paddington Way, Between Garden St & Plummer Rd - (300.87± Acres) - ARG to RR - Wendy Gail Taylor, Robert C. Taylor, and Chris Taylor HDH, LLC (R.E. # 001316-0020, 002654-0050, 002846-0000, 002867-0010, 002875-0010, & 002883-0060 (Portion)) (Appl # L-6136-26A) (Dist. 12-White) (Read) (LUZ) (JWC Apv) (PD & PC Apv)
8/25/26 CO Introduced: LUZ, JWC
9/1/26 LUZ Read 2nd & Rerefer
9/8/26 CO Read 2nd & Rerefer
9/22/26 CO PH Addn'l 10/13/26
LUZ PH: 10/6/26
Public Hearing Pursuant to Sec 163.3184, F.S. & Ch 650, Pt 4, Ord Code - 9/22/26 & 10/13/26

Ordinance 2026-648 was moved and seconded for a recommendation of approval.

Mr. Ed Lukacovic, Planning Department, gave a presentation on Ordinance 2026-648. He explained that the ordinance before the Commission is a large-scale land use amendment that would be transmitted to the state for its review upon the City Council's approval. He stated that it would return to the City Council as an adoption ordinance, with additional public hearings, if the state does not have any problems with it.

He then provided an overview of the site, including its location, the size of both the subject site and the wetlands, and its current and proposed land use categories. He then explained the development potentials of the site based on its current land use category of Agriculture (AGR) and its proposed land use category of Rural Residential (RR). He then explained that the land use categories of the surrounding areas are AGR and RR. He stated that an aerial map shows that most of the site is forest, wooded wetlands, pasture, and overgrown pasture, with an open sandpit located on the southwest portion of the site.

He then provided an overview of the land utilization map, explaining that the land surrounding the site has uses that include pasture, wetlands, timber, single-family homes, sand mining operations, and mobile homes. He then explained the development area map and stated that the site is located in both the rural development area and the suburban development area. He added that since the application is proposing RR, there is no need to extend the suburban development area. He stated that both the sanitary sewer line and the water line on Garden Street would need to be extended to accommodate the proposed lots.

He provided an overview of the Florida Land Use Cover and Forms Classification System map. He then presented the Potential Development Areas Map and showed the areas of the site that could potentially be developed outside the wetlands. He added that the site already has property access roads, some of which already cross wetlands. He stated that the access roads would need to be improved if the area is used for single-family subdivisions, which may impact the wetlands. He added that the improvements would need to be mitigated and approved by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

He then presented the City's GIS wetlands layer to show which areas are Category II wetlands and which are Category III wetlands. He explained that there are 135.09 acres of Category II wetlands and 32.08 acres of Category III wetlands, for a combined total of 167.17 acres. He further explained that Category II wetlands are wetlands that have a direct impact on the City's waterways, in this case the Trout River, Trout Creek, and several drainage areas. He then explained that Category III wetlands do not have a direct impact on the City's waterways, but that if those wetlands flood, they percolate into the soil surface and into the high water table and may eventually reach the waterway system through a filtration process.

He then presented the flood zones map, which shows that 126.14 acres are in an AE flood zone and that 4.74 acres are in an X flood zone. He then presented the Adaptation Action Area Map, which he described as a combination of the 500-year flood zone and Category 3 flood surge. He stated that since the site is located substantially west of the coast and is at higher elevations, the Category 3 flood surge does not affect the area and only the 500-year flood zone applies. He presented an elevations map of the site and noted that there is no creek bed that traverses the site.

He provided an overview of the soils map of the site but noted inaccuracies in the map, stating that the northern portion of the site is shown as Lynn Haven wetland soil while closer inspection shows that it is not wetlands at all. He added that determination of what portions are truly wetlands can be done when the development is before the Water Management District, and that a wetlands boundary determination can then be made.

He provided an overview of the drainage basin map, which shows that the site lies in the Trout River basin, and then presented a drainage path map showing that the site drains into an unnamed branch and Trout Creek, which drain into the Trout River and then into the St. Johns River.

The motion to recommend approval of Ordinance 2026-648 was approved, with only CM Gay in opposition.

2026-0698 ORD Approp \$111,233.00 in Fund Bal from the Environmental Protection Fund to Prov Funding for the 19th State of the River Report for the Lower St. Johns River Basin; Prov for Waiver of Sec 111.755 (Environmental Protection Fund), Pt 7 (Environment & Conservation), Ch 111 (Special Revenue & Trust Accounts), Ord Code, to Auth Utilization of Funds from the Fund to Cont Funding the Annual State of the River Report; Prov for Waiver of Sec 360.602 (Uses of Fund), Pt 6 (Environmental Protection Fund), Ch 360 (Environmental Regulation), Ord Code, to Allow for the Utilization of Funds from the Fund to Cont Funding the Annual State of the River Report; Apv, & Auth the Mayor, or Her Desig, & the Corp Sec to Execute & Deliver an Agrmt btwn the City & JU for the Proj; Invoking the Exemption in Sec 126.108(G) (Exemptions from Competitive Solicitation), Subpt A (General Regulations), Pt 1 (General Regulations; Ethics & Transparency in Public Contracting), Ch 126 (Procurement Code), Ord Code, to Direct Contract with JU for the Proj; Waiving Sec 118.107 (Nonprofits to Receive Funding Through a Competitive Evaluated Award Process; Waiver & Disclosures), Pt 1 (General Provisions), Ch 118 (City Grants), Ord Code, to Allow a Direct Contract with JU; Prov for Carryover to FY 26-27; Prov for Oversight by the Office of Admin Svcs, Environmental Quality Div; Requiring Annual Reports (B.T. 26-095) (Dillard) (Req of Mayor) (Co-Sponsors CMs Peluso & Johnson) (JWC Apv)
9/8/26 CO Introduced: R, NCSPHS, F, JWC
9/14/26 R Read 2nd & Rerefer
9/14/26 NCSPHS Read 2nd & Rerefer
9/15/26 F Read 2nd & Rerefer
9/22/26 CO PH Read 2nd & Rerefer
10/5/26 R Amend/Approve 7-0
10/5/26 NCSPHS Amend/Approve 7-0
10/6/26 F Amend/Approve 7-0
Public Hearing Pursuant to Ch 166, F.S. & C.R. 3.601 - 9/22/26

Dr. Pinto provided an explanation of the necessity of Ordinance 2026-698. Dr. Pinto stated that he would read to the Commission an email he had received from Mr. James Richardson, Environmental Protection Board, which provides a concise summary of the ordinance.

He read Mr. Richardson's email, which stated that the ordinance appropriates funds for the 19th State of the River Report and was introduced at the City Council's September 8, 2026 meeting. The email added that the appropriation amount is \$111,233 to Jacksonville University and will continue funding for the project, which the Jacksonville Environmental Protection Board has funded annually since the project's inception in the 2007-2008 year. Dr. Pinto stated that the email explains that the State of the River Report will describe the current health of the St. Johns River. He added that it also explains that the bill includes a waiver to allow for the continuous nature of the funding, a waiver to allow JU to receive funding without going through a competitive award process, and an exemption from the procurement code because JU is listed in the appropriating legislation. Dr. Pinto stated that the email explains that all the requested waivers have been done with previous funding bills for the report.

Mr. Adam Hoyles, Environmental Protection Board, explained that the Board values the State of the River Report for synthesizing collected data and information on the river and providing it in a digestible format. He added that the Board does have a funding mechanism from fines and fees from violations of NPDES permits, though the intent of the fund is not to use it for recurring expenses. He explained that this is why they thought it would be best for the City to appropriate funds for the report.

CM Peluso stated that he supports the bill and would like to be added as a co-sponsor. CM Peluso then asked whether the report provides policy recommendations.

Chair Johnson then asked, out of an abundance of caution, that the Commission provide a motion and a second on Ordinance 2026-698. Ordinance 2026-698 was moved and seconded for a recommendation of approval.

Dr. Pinto then addressed CM Peluso's question and stated that the purpose of the report is to provide a status of the river, what people can do on an individual level, and what the relevant agencies are currently doing. CM Peluso stated that he wanted policymakers, who are not experts in environmental policy, to have policy recommendations available in the report. He then asked whether it was possible for that to be included in future reports. Dr. Pinto stated that he can take the recommendation back to the group, but that the purpose of the report is to provide information in an easily digestible format while providing data that shows what current policies are achieving or not achieving. CM Peluso stated that over \$100,000 in taxpayer money is being spent on the report and that he wants exact policy recommendations that can be implemented. He then cited the Special Committee on Critical Quality of Life Issues, which produced three reports on housing, homelessness, and health care, and stated that those reports produced policy recommendations.

The motion to recommend approval of Ordinance 2026-698 was approved without objection.

8. FIND Subcommittee Formation

Chair Johnson stated that rather than only addressing the FIND Subcommittee, he would like the Commission to receive updates on all of its subcommittees.

Mr. Marc Hardesty, Artificial Reef Subcommittee Chair, provided an update and stated that while the Subcommittee has not met in a few months because of the break, an artificial reef was deployed approximately 28 miles off the coast of Jacksonville off Mayport at the end of June.

He then explained the deployment process, stating that the barge left Green Cove Springs for Mayport and that large concrete culverts donated by various businesses were installed. He added that the Jacksonville Offshore Sport Fishing Club is spearheading the project while using state and federal grant money for the reefs. Mr. Hardesty stated that the process is becoming a public-private partnership, with the Jacksonville Offshore Sport Fishing Club establishing a 501(c)(3) foundation. He added that the plan is to deploy three more reefs in the coming year and that an application process for state grants is currently underway.

He stated that Governor DeSantis authorized a multi-million-dollar expenditure to develop artificial reefs because the Governor sees their value to the state. He added that Jacksonville had been the state leader in artificial reef deployment in the 1970s and 1980s, that Okaloosa County is now the state leader, and that this is an opportunity for Jacksonville to deploy more reefs.

Mr. Hardesty asked Chair Johnson that the Artificial Reef Subcommittee have a regular spot on the Commission agenda so that he can give regular reports to the Commission. He added that he may not have a report to give for some meetings but that he wants to keep the Commission regularly informed. Chair Johnson confirmed that he would add the Artificial Reef Subcommittee to the regular agenda moving forward.

Mr. Matt Jones, Fort George River Sandbar Vessel Speed Regulation Task Force Chair, provided an update and stated that the Task Force is currently preparing a formal, publicly noticed meeting that will follow Sunshine Law.

Mr. Jones added, in reference to Mr. Hardesty's Artificial Reef Subcommittee report, that artificial reef deployment creates revenue for the City. He added that artificial reef deployment was done without taxpayer dollars. Mr. Hardesty stated that this project was done with taxpayer dollars, that those dollars are earmarked for that purpose, and that it is a matter of Duval County tapping into those dollars. Mr. Hardesty added that Mr. Jones made a point about the importance of the contributions of the Jacksonville Offshore Sport Fishing Club in the process. He added that he anticipates that a number of artificial reef deployments would eventually be entirely privately funded or a combination.

Chair Johnson stated his intention to form the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) Subcommittee. Ms. Shannon MacGillis, OGC, explained that the Subcommittee can be formed in one of two ways: through a charge memorandum, or through a declaration by the Chair forming the Subcommittee and naming Mr. Barker as its Chair, then giving him the discretion to recommend or request its members. She added that the Subcommittee can have non-Waterways Commissioners as its members as long as Mr. Barker is the Chair of the Subcommittee.

Chair Johnson asked whether the Waterways Commission must form the FIND Subcommittee at the

beginning of each session. Ms. MacGillis stated that it is the best practice to do so.

Chair Johnson reappointed Mr. Barker as the Chair of the FIND Subcommittee. He added that Mr. Hoyles will reach out to the FIND Subcommittee members and that the Commission will appoint them at the next meeting, if necessary. Mr. Hoyles expressed his desire to continue to be a member of the FIND Subcommittee.

9. Adjournment

Chair Johnson asked whether there was any other business. No one raised any further business.

Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:04 p.m.

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Minutes: Steven Libby, Council Research

slibby@coj.net, (904) 255-5147

Posted: 10/6/26, 4:00 p.m.