

City of Jacksonville

*117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202*



Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

3:30 PM

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

Special Committee on Drowning Prevention

*Council Member Reggie Gaffney, Jr., Chair
Council Member Tyrone Clark-Murray, Vice-Chair
Council Member Mike Gay*

*Legislative Asst: Vanessa Galan
Research: Steven Libby
Auditors: Heather Reber
OGC: Shannon MacGillis*

I. Call to Order

Chair Reggie Gaffney, Jr., convened the meeting at 3:30 p.m. and called for introductions.

II. Introductions

III. Approval of September 9th Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2026, meeting was made and seconded, and the minutes were approved without objection.

IV. Opening Remarks

Chair Gaffney, Jr., summarized the September 9 meeting, noting that the Special Committee had addressed conducting a pond inventory, which ponds are private versus public, whether to focus on current or future ponds, discovering what other cities and counties are doing, what can be done now, and the parameters of Senate Bill 180. He added that Chief Andre Ayoub, Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD) Emergency Preparedness Division, had formed a task force of fifteen agencies to collaborate on the issue.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked the other members whether they would like to make comments before Chief Ayoub's presentation. CM Tyrona Clark-Murray noted that Mr. Michael Fackler, General Counsel, is attending the meeting to discuss Senate Bill 180. Chair Gaffney, Jr., thanked Mr. Fackler for attending, then thanked former State Senator Tony Hill and former State Senator Audrey Gibson for attending the meeting.

V. Working Group Data & Research Presentation
Phase I: Understanding the Problem

Chief Ayoub provided a workplan for the Special Committee and stated that this meeting is about understanding the problem before solutions can be identified. He stated that October 7 is for identifying gaps, November 2 is for building solutions, and that by the end of November or early December, the goal is to adopt and deliver a final report. Chief Ayoub then reviewed the Special Committee's six charges.

Mr. Tyler Nolen, Northeast Florida Regional Council Special Projects Coordinator, stated that the data he will present addresses drowning as a whole, but that he does not want to lose sight of those with intellectual and developmental differences who lost their lives in retention ponds. Mr. Nolen reviewed the type of data collected, the relationships and trends from the data, and questions for the Working Group.

He then reviewed the locations of JFRD calls for service from 2025 to 2026 and noted that the highest average is private residence pools and that the highest risk is beaches. He added that retention ponds are also included in the data and that a deeper understanding is sought of why and how such incidents happen and how they can be prevented in the future.

Mr. Nolen provided an executive summary of the core findings, emphasizing pediatric vulnerability, while noting that those with intellectual and developmental differences are at risk across all ages. He then reiterated that private residential pools are the number one location for calls for service in 2025 and 2026, that there is a seasonal peak, and that there are a considerable number of cardiac arrest cases. He added that there were solutions that could be implemented regarding CPR and the deployment of AEDs.

Mr. Nolen then reviewed risk factors by age group. He noted that toddlers ages 0 to 4 were the most vulnerable group, and that unintended pool access was due to a lack of locks on doors, fences, and gates. He added that those ages 10 to 39 accounted for 36 incidents, or 42 percent. He then noted that males accounted for 73 percent of incidents, and highlighted the ZIP code clusters in 32226, 32250, and 32218. He added that 32218 was the ZIP code with a high number of retention pond deaths. Mr. Nolen stated that analysis was still ongoing because JFRD's dataset required manual review, that multiple datasets were being cross-referenced, and that Autism Spectrum Disorder-related drownings were underreported.

Chief Ayoub then highlighted several existing programs serving the City, including water competency and safety programs, swim lessons, and public safety and support programs for vulnerable populations. Chief Ayoub then highlighted several tasks in progress, including collecting data on retention ponds, researching programs throughout Florida, and expanding the Working Group to include more stakeholders and agencies.

VI. Committee Discussion and Questions
- Discussion with Working Group & SMEs
- Additional Data & Research Needs

CM Mike Gay asked whether any of the drownings in the ZIP codes had occurred at the beaches. Mr. Nolen stated that ZIP code 32250 is in the Beaches area. CM Gay asked whether any of those were related to the Huguenot or Beaches area. Chief Ayoub stated that he could send that information at a later time. CM Gay stated that the information would be helpful, because it was eye-opening to see the number of incidents in their ZIP codes.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., shared CM Gay's sentiment and asked whether it was currently known why incidents were concentrated in those ZIP codes and why they predominantly involved males. He added that if those ZIP codes were problem areas, the problematic ponds could be narrowed down and identified. He then stated that problems could be identified, including the slope, lack of signage, and lack of lighting. Chief Ayoub agreed that the statistics were alarming, and added that if the data showed that children were eloping, an initiative could be started with Home Depot to provide locks for doors. Chief Ayoub also stated that, given the seasonal data, public outreach efforts could be initiated to correspond with the seasons.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked whether there were currently any best practices that could be shared. Chief Ayoub stated that Orlando, Miami, and Tampa had been contacted for more information. Chair Gaffney, Jr., confirmed with Chief Ayoub that a five-year overview would be provided for the next meeting. Chief Ayoub stated that the City's Technology Solutions GIS team and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) were compiling a map of the retention ponds. Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked that approximate numbers of public versus private ponds be provided at the next meeting.

CM Clark-Murray stated that, in her experience working with students with autism, the majority of those students were male, and cited this as an explanation for the gender disparity. Chief Ayoub stated that he had reached out to Duval County Public Schools to be part of the Working Group.

CM Gay asked what the current requirements are for door alarms. Chief Ayoub stated that he was not sure and that he would follow up with CM Gay. He added that the goal for the next meeting was to identify all the rules and regulations regarding ponds and pools.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Ms. Shannon MacGillis, OGC, whether it was possible to mandate locks on doors for at-risk children. Ms. MacGillis stated that she had legal concerns about the idea, but that she would follow up with Chair Gaffney, Jr.

Mr. Joe Inderhees, Mayor's Administration, thanked Mr. Nolen for his time and research, and expressed appreciation for the collaboration among the organizations in the Working Group. Mr. Inderhees then asked for more information regarding the REVAMP program.

Chief Ayoub described the REVAMP program as a no-cost, voluntary identification program to aid in the safe return of individuals who are endangered, vulnerable, or missing, particularly those with cognitive or memory impairments or sensory disabilities. Chief Ayoub then presented the REVAMP program flyer and stated that registration can be completed online through JaxReady or by phone.

Ms. Jonetta Buxton, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO), described the REVAMP program and how the information of those who register is protected. She explained that the information collected includes how to interact with the registered person, the type of autism or cognitive diagnosis, the person's

favorite places, and the best way to search for the person, and that this information provides an opportunity to reach out to the person's schools or therapists. She added that all of the information is covered by HIPAA. She further stated that the collected information is attached to the person's phone number, tag, and home address through the CAD system. She then explained the canine scent kit, which enables bloodhounds to track a person's body scent, and the telemetry tracker, which allows vulnerable persons to be tracked without GPS.

Captain Rickie Grace, JFRD, stated that the information is also used to reduce the time it takes to find eloped persons, cutting search time by 2 to 3 hours, and to determine how best to approach those persons. Chief Ayoub emphasized the importance of time in finding missing persons, noting that the window to find eloped persons is minutes rather than hours.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked whether the program had been used in the most recent drownings. Chief Ayoub stated that it had not been, because those involved had not been registered with the program.

Mr. Inderhees asked how many families had registered for the REVAMP program. Chief Ayoub responded that 622 had registered. Mr. Inderhees emphasized the program's potential to reduce response times.

CM Clark-Murray asked Mr. Fackler for an explanation of the legal constraints of Senate Bill 180. Mr. Fackler stated that Senate Bill 180 limits how the City can regulate or impose new restrictions on new developments. He stated that OGC interprets the statute as being concerned not with the purpose of a restriction but with its impact on developers. He added that he would work with and advise the Special Committee when drafting legislation, but that creative drafting was unlikely to eliminate the risk associated with Senate Bill 180. Ms. MacGillis added that the key phrase is "government action," and that Senate Bill 180 does not prevent voluntary actions, such as the REVAMP program or Home Depot voluntarily placing alarms on doors. Mr. Fackler further stated that a policy based on encouragement, voluntary cooperation, incentives, the awarding of grant dollars, or similar measures would not violate Senate Bill 180.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Mr. Fackler whether legislation he proposed to create a process through which the community could petition to place a fence around their pond would violate Senate Bill 180. He emphasized that the fence would not be mandated. Mr. Fackler stated that his concern was that the legislation would create a more restrictive process, but that he was willing to look into it further. Chair Gaffney, Jr., then asked Mr. Fackler to look into it further for the next meeting.

CM Gay asked Mr. Fackler whether there was an avenue that moved away from the development aspect and toward the life-saving aspect. Mr. Fackler stated that the purpose of a measure is secondary to its impact if that impact is ultimately more restrictive or tighter regulation of development. CM Gay stated that he believed the life-saving avenue should be the focus rather than the development avenue.

CM Clark-Murray asked Mr. Fackler and Ms. MacGillis whether the City had ever been sued over retention ponds it owns. Mr. Fackler stated that he was not aware of any such lawsuits, but that he could work with Risk to gather that information. Ms. MacGillis stated that she was not aware of any litigation over retention ponds the City owns, and that she would be surprised if the City had been sued, because the law surrounding tort liability for ponds is difficult.

CM Clark-Murray stated that she had researched legal cases involving children who drowned in retention ponds at apartment complexes. She stated that she had researched elements such as negligence, foreseeability, and different duty standards to draft legislation assigning accountability, citing homeowners' associations (HOAs) that do not maintain retention ponds. She added that she was unsure whether public housing is owned by the City or the state, and raised the question of who would be responsible if a child living in an apartment complex with a broken latch, managed or owned by the state or federally funded, died in the complex's retention ponds.

VII. Next Steps: Phase II---- > Identify the Gaps

VIII. Public Comment

Dr. Miriam Lynch, Director, Diversity in Aquatics, spoke on the dangers of wandering and drowning for persons with autism and the benefit of engaging trusted stakeholders. She described numerous historic and trust barriers that prevent people from signing up for free programs.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., stated that a public comment card was submitted by Mr. Ernest Smith, who was not present to speak.

Former State Senator Audrey Gibson explained the differences between retention ponds and detention ponds and asked what determines the construction of one over the other. She stated that she would look into whether more detention ponds could be required in residential areas and whether pumping stations could be added at retention ponds.

IX. Recap and Phase II Next Steps

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Ms. Gibson to look into amending Senate Bill 180 if reelected. He added that Ms. Nina Sickler, Public Works, could look into the requirements for retention ponds versus detention ponds. Chair Gaffney, Jr., then asked Mr. Fackler to provide an analysis of the proposed petition process for the next meeting. Chair Gaffney, Jr., stated that retention pond maintenance must also be investigated.

X. Adjournment

Chair Gaffney, Jr., announced that the next meeting would be held on October 7, 2026, at 3:30 p.m., and adjourned the meeting at 4:36 p.m.

Minutes: Steven Libby, Council Research
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Posted: 10/5/26, 3:00 p.m.