City of Jacksonville

117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

3:30 PM

Council Chamber,
1st Floor, City Hall

Special Committee on Drowning Prevention

Council Member Reggie Gaffney, Jr., Chair
Council Member Tyrona 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 23, 2026 Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2026, meeting was made and seconded, and the minutes were approved without objection.

IV. Chair's Opening Remarks

Chair Gaffney, Jr., explained the meeting agenda, noting that the Working Group would provide an update to the Special Committee on data collection, swimming initiatives, and identifying public versus private retention ponds.

V. Working Group Update: Chief Ayoub, JFRD & Tyler Nolen, NEFRC

- 5-Year Drowning Data Overview
- Retention Pond GIS Analysis and Next Steps
- Personal Testimony: Anna Machiz-Dillon, The Arc of St. Johns
- Drowning Prevention Research Overview
- Closing Comments and Working Group Next Steps

Chief Andre Ayoub, Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD) Emergency Preparedness Division, and Mr. Tyler Nolen, Northeast Florida Regional Council Special Projects Coordinator, gave a presentation to the Special Committee to provide an update on the status of the Working Group's initiatives.

Chief Ayoub provided an overview of the Special Committee's charges and stated that the Emergency Response and Data and the Interagency and Community Partnerships charges had been completed, while the remaining charges were still in progress. He explained that at the previous meeting, data on the locations of JFRD calls for service had been presented for 2025 and 2026, and that the data had since been expanded to cover 2021 through 2026, increasing the total from 86 incidents to 291.

He then presented an executive summary of the core findings, stating that children under 10 accounted for 46 percent of incidents, while toddlers ages 0 to 4 accounted for 36 percent. He added that private residential pools were the number one location for calls for service from 2021 to 2026, at 31 percent, and that 59 percent of incidents occurred between April and July. He also stated that 22 percent of incidents resulted in cardiac arrest.

Chief Ayoub then provided an overview of the gender and geographic concentrations of the incidents, stating that males accounted for 67 percent of incidents and that 133 incidents occurred within five ZIP codes. He stated that 49 incidents occurred in ZIP code 32250, Jacksonville Beach, with 39 of those at the beach, and that 28 occurred in ZIP code 32226, the Huguenot and Heckscher Drive area, with 19 at the beach. He noted that ZIP code 32233, Atlantic Beach, had 18 incidents, with 14 at the beach. He added that ZIP code 32256 had 20 incidents, 5 pond-related and 13 pool-related, while ZIP code 32218 had 18 incidents, 2 pond-related and 14 pool-related.

Chief Ayoub then provided an overview of drowning deaths by age group from 2020 to 2026, noting that the age groups with the highest counts were 30 to 39 with 32, 40 to 49 with 31, and 20 to 29 with 28. He then presented the drowning death rates by age group adjusted for population, noting that the results would differ from the previous slide, and that the highest rates were ages 0 to 4, 40 to 49, and 30 to 39.

CM Tyrona Clark-Murray stated that she found it interesting that the age group with the largest number of drowning deaths was ages 40 to 49, and asked Chief Ayoub whether it would be possible to break down that age group by ethnicity, by whether those individuals knew how to swim, and by other circumstances involved, such as boating accidents, pool accidents, or intoxication. Chief Ayoub confirmed that it was possible, and that the Working Group would have sub-working groups charged with examining the data in greater depth.

Chief Ayoub explained that a comprehensive pond layer for Duval County, integrating multiple GIS datasets, had been created. He added that 18,549 water features had been reviewed, 9,577 ponds identified, and 9,340 of those ponds tied to a parcel. He then explained how the GIS mapping classifies ponds as either tied or not tied to a parcel, which determines whether property ownership records can be linked to a pond. He then explained that the difference between public and private retention ponds hinges on ownership, maintenance responsibility, and right-of-way and access. He added that 6,602 privately owned ponds and 2,711 publicly owned ponds had been identified.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked how often retention ponds are inspected. Chief Ayoub stated that he did not have the answer to that question, since the primary focus had been identifying the ponds. He added that now that the public and private ponds had been identified, the data could be brought back to the Working Group to address questions such as inspections, barriers, and maintenance.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Mr. Steve Long, Public Works, whether he had an answer regarding the inspection and maintenance of public retention ponds. Mr. Long stated that Public Works mows City-owned ponds over twenty times a year and that those ponds are checked at least monthly. He added that, as he understood it, private ponds undergo a certification process with the Water Management District, which has a self-certification program requiring the owner to hire an inspector to inspect the pond and report back to the District. He noted that the District would be better able to speak to the process.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., confirmed with Mr. Long that City-owned ponds are inspected about twice a month. Mr. Long clarified that this frequency reflects only the mowing schedule, and that Public Works also looks at the ponds regularly for other reasons, such as drainage. He added that he believed private ponds are checked every two years.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Mr. Long whether checks of City-owned ponds focus on hazards, aesthetics, or both. Mr. Long stated that when ponds are mowed, trash is removed and inspections occur, because the City has a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that requires routine inspections.

CM Mike Gay told Chief Ayoub that it would be helpful to know whether each pond-related death occurred in a public or a private pond. Chief Ayoub stated that after the data was received, work began to identify risk factors that may correlate with these incidents, and that the leading factor identified was apartment complexes and residential areas.

CM Clark-Murray asked Mr. Long whether the City's ponds must be reported to DEP. Mr. Long confirmed that they are, and that the City's MS4 permit through DEP requires reporting to DEP. CM Clark-Murray asked Mr. Long whether the District has overarching authority over the construction and design of ponds. Mr. Long stated that he could not speak for the District, but that when a new project is designed and developed, the developer must obtain a permit from the District under its published criteria.

Mr. Joe Inderhees, Mayor's Administration, asked Mr. Long whether he could explain to the Special Committee the City's policy regarding lawn maintenance around the ring of City-owned ponds. Mr. Long stated that the City does not mow to the waterline, leaving a 5-foot-wide strip of unmaintained grass around each pond to make it less attractive for people to approach the pond. Mr. Inderhees asked Mr. Long whether the Special Committee could consider a recommendation to increase the buffer beyond 5 feet. Mr. Long stated that if the Special Committee wished to do so, Public Works would implement it.

CM Clark-Murray confirmed with Mr. Long that a strip of vegetation is intentionally left around City-owned ponds to prevent people from reaching the water. Mr. Long stated that such strips are left at most City-owned ponds. CM Clark-Murray asked Mr. Long whether the same practice applies at parks.

Mr. Long stated that an unmaintained area is left at all ponds that Public Works mows.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., stated that legislation could be passed to increase the buffer for public ponds. He then asked Ms. Shannon MacGillis, OGC, whether a buffer requirement for private ponds would violate Senate Bill 180. Ms. MacGillis stated that legislation would not be needed for ponds on land owned by the City and that it is a policy decision by the City. She added that for ponds on land not owned by the City or on land owned by a private entity, the City could implement recommendations or incentives without violating Senate Bill 180, but that mandates on private land have Senate Bill 180 implications.

CM Clark-Murray stated that because of the importance of the District in regulating ponds, there should be a representative of the District present at future meetings. Chair Gaffney, Jr., stated that he would make a note to request a District representative for the next meeting. He added that the next meeting could also address the differences between retention and detention ponds and how often private ponds are maintained.

CM Gay concurred with CM Clark-Murray's emphasis on the importance of the District as the authority with jurisdiction over retention ponds. He added that it was critical to involve the District, because it was possible the District could make potential changes through legislation. Chief Ayoub stated that he had a point of contact at the District and would reach out to them.

CM Ju'Coby Pittman stated that she believed the District did not have the staff or funding capacity to do so. She added that when she and then-CM LeAnna Cumber first worked on the issue, they had several discussions and implemented some initiatives to address it, and offered to share her experience with the Special Committee.

Chief Ayoub explained that with the pond data received, the next step was to determine how public and private ponds could each be addressed. He added that he understood the importance of the retention pond discussion but did not want to lose sight of drowning incidents at pools and beaches.

Mr. Nolen provided an overview of several swimming lesson programs in Tampa, Orlando, and St. Petersburg. He stated that Orange County runs a partnership-based swimming lesson program, and that Broward County established a centralized source of information on water safety and drowning prevention through a task force. He noted that Miami-Dade County has the most comprehensive system.

CM Clark-Murray emphasized the importance of publicizing existing programs. She added that it would be a good idea to involve the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) as well.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., expressed a need for the City to have a central location for all resources related to water safety and drowning.

CM Pittman noted that it might be worth checking with the Mayor's Office for resources on publicizing water safety and drowning programs, since work had previously been done on the subject.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., asked Mr. Inderhees to look into previous materials and resources the Mayor's Office may have. Mr. Inderhees confirmed that he would, and emphasized the importance of building a website centralizing those resources to support public safety.

Ms. Anna Machiz-Dillon, Director of Advocacy and Community Affairs, The Arc of St. Johns, provided personal testimony to the Special Committee as a mother and showed a video of her 16-month-old son participating in Infant Swimming Resource (ISR) lessons. She added that she and her husband had started swimming lessons for their son early to build confidence, water awareness, and life-saving skills. She stated that at the time, they did not know their son would be diagnosed with cerebral palsy and severe autism. She added that he mastered the eight-week swimming course in six weeks while regulating his vestibular and sensory systems, experiencing freedom of movement in the water, and developing muscles he needed to learn to walk.

She emphasized that for children, particularly those at risk, water safety does not begin and end with swimming lessons, and should include water competency and survival-focused instruction. She noted that no single solution can completely prevent drownings and that layers of protection are needed.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., thanked Ms. Machiz-Dillon for her testimony and stated that if parents knew about the resources available, it might save a life.

CM Clark-Murray thanked Ms. Machiz-Dillon for her testimony and stated that her son demonstrated that children with autism can learn how to swim.

CM Gay expressed his support for survival swimming lessons for all children and noted that his daughter had taken them at 18 months old.

VI. Fencing Presentation, Sean Shapiro

Chair Gaffney, Jr., apologized to Mr. Sean Shapiro, Fortera Fencing, for not getting to his presentation, and stated that he would place him on the agenda for the next meeting.

VII. Committee Discussion and Identifying the Gaps

VIII. Public Comment

Ms. Tarina Akbari provided personal testimony regarding the drowning of her son, Rakim, in a retention pond, and spoke on the need for fencing around ponds and expanded access to swimming lessons for children.

Chair Gaffney, Jr., thanked Ms. Akbari for her personal testimony and stated that the purpose of the Special Committee is to help children like Rakim. He added that his goal is to eventually introduce legislation based on the work of the Special Committee.

IX. Chair's Recap and Phase III Next Steps (Oct 21st - Nov 2nd)

Chair Gaffney, Jr., thanked the Working Group for its data collection and expressed a desire to present solutions. He added that he wanted the Water Management District to attend the next meeting to discuss its management and inspection of private retention ponds. He also expressed a desire to hear from the Planning Department and the School Board.

X. Adjournment

Chair Gaffney, Jr., adjourned the meeting at 4:44 p.m.

Minutes: Steven Libby, Council Research
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Posted: 10/19/26, 3:00 p.m.