City of Jacksonville

117 W. Duval Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Meeting Minutes

Fort George River Sandbar Vessel Speed Regulation Task Force

Wednesday, October 14, 2026

1:00 PM

Don Davis Room,
1st Floor, City Hall

Jacksonville Waterways Commission

CM Rahman K. Johnson, Ph.D, Chair
CM Mike Gay, Vice Chair
CM Jimmy Peluso
CM Matt Carlucci, Alternate
Jon Michael Barker
Robert Birtalan
James Hobson
State Rep. Dean Black
Mark Devereaux
Andrew Fraden
Marc Hardesty - Excused
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

I. Call To Order

Chair Matt Jones convened the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

II. Attendance

III. Pledge of Allegiance

IV. Introduction of Topic by Chair

Chair Jones provided an overview of the need to regulate vessel speed at the Fort George River Sandbar, stating that it is an urgent public safety measure that would reduce dangerous wakes, protect swimmers and children, and prevent collisions, capsizing, and other life-threatening boating accidents.

He stated that on June 10, 2026, the Waterways Commission voted to form a task force. He added that on August 21, 2026, a charge memorandum was issued naming Chair Jones, Mr. J. Hobson, and Mr. Scott Thomas as members charged with collecting competent and substantial evidence to support a finding by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) that an ordinance regulating vessel speeds in the Fort George River Sandbar area is necessary to protect public safety, as described in Rule 68D-21.004 of the Florida Administrative Code.

Chair Jones reviewed Section 327.46, Florida Statutes, stating that it limits but does not prohibit municipalities from regulating vessel speed within certain waterways. He added that any vessel speed regulation passed by a municipality cannot take effect until FWC determines, by competent and substantial evidence, that the ordinance is necessary to protect public safety.

Chair Jones invited the Task Force members to review the data and aerial photographs included in the meeting packet. He cited Rule 68D-21.004(4)(b) of the Florida Administrative Code, which provides that an ordinance may be approved for an area containing a documented navigational hazard where vessel operation above slow speed, minimum wake endangers the vessel or its occupants. He added that the last page of color aerial photographs in the meeting packet showed an example of a navigational hazard.

Chair Jones asked representatives of FWC and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) Marine Unit whether they had competent and substantial evidence from a law enforcement perspective to contribute to the meeting packet. Lt. Kevin Kilcoin, JSO, stated that he had asked JSO's crime analysis unit to pull calls for service in that area. He added that JSO's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system is primarily designed around residential and business addresses, and that he had provided several locations to search, including the Fort George River, the Intracoastal Waterway, Little Talbot Island, and Huguenot Park. Lt. Kilcoin stated that his request covered general calls for service received in the last two years.

Captain Michael Haney, FWC, stated that he had spoken with FWC's Boating and Waterways Section, and that the City could submit a public records request for statistical data. He added that, in FWC's experience, there had not been a substantial number of accidents and serious injuries in that area.

Chair Jones asked Captain Haney about substantial congestion in the area. Captain Haney stated that there was no way to quantify congestion, since FWC does not have traffic counters on the water, and that the Task Force would therefore need to rely on calls for service, boating accidents, and injuries.

Chair Jones asked whether Captain Haney or Lt. Kilcoin recalled a jet ski accident in that area about a year or a couple of years earlier. Captain Haney stated that he did not recall that particular jet ski incident. He added that, as he understood the process, FWC commissioners review and vote on wake zones established by FWC, whereas this would be a City ordinance. He stated that if the City passed the ordinance, the City would submit it to FWC's Boating and Waterways Section for review, rather than to the commissioners.

Chair Jones stated that he would seek further clarification on the process.

CM Mike Gay stated that state authorities in the Kingsley Plantation area were having issues with the number of boaters and jet skiers passing through the area, which was affecting their dock and facility. Captain Jim Suber, Waterways Coordinator, stated that two FWC lieutenants had previously asked his office what the City could do about the issues, and that the area's shifting sands make it more dangerous. Captain Suber asked whether JSO and FWC viewed the problems in the Fort George area as serious enough for law enforcement to support a vessel speed regulation.

Lt. Kilcoin stated that the JSO Marine Unit would support any initiative that promotes public safety. Captain Haney stated that he was bound by the law, and that while boating safety is a top priority for FWC, the question was whether the proposal meets the criteria.

Mr. Scott Thomas stated that the initiative to reduce vessel speed would also benefit wildlife such as manatees.

Mr. Brian Burket, Parks Department, stated that the Task Force was taking the right first step, and that it was a matter of ensuring that the evidence meets FWC's criteria. He added that Captain Haney had correctly described the process, and that FWC staff make the approval decision, but that if staff deny the application, the City can appeal and the matter would go to the Commission.

He also clarified that the area includes not only state parks but also national park land, and that Kingsley Plantation is managed by the national park. He added that the national park was the one that had initially come to the City with concerns about an eroding shoreline and high traffic at a public boat dock, and that it had voiced its support for the effort. He stated that he was unsure of the state park's position.

Mr. Andrew Fraden asked whether boaters were not already responsible for their own wake, and whether the proposal would be seasonal or year-round. He added that he was also concerned about a proliferation of no-wake zones throughout the City. Captain Suber, responding to Mr. Fraden's concerns, stated that the area is a destination rather than a pass-through area and that there are no residential areas there. He added that the regulation would affect only National Park Service, state, and county land, and that the area's dynamic environment makes it much more dangerous.

Chair Jones emphasized the need for the proposed no-wake zone, particularly because inexperienced boaters travel through the area at high speeds without knowing the dangers posed by its congestion and environment.

CM Gay asked Mr. Burket whether the national park uses a boat ramp or a dock. Mr. Burket stated that the national park has a dock, while the City has a boat ramp at Alimacani. CM Gay referenced a new law under which, if there is a blind curve in an existing no-wake zone for a boat ramp, the City can expand the zone to the maximum extent allowed. Mr. Burket recommended also including the blind corner issue when the Task Force presents its case to FWC.

Captain Suber asked for a review of the process for implementing a no-wake zone, which Captain Haney provided.

Chair Jones asked Captain Haney to look into whether the sandbar itself could be considered substantial and competent evidence of a navigational hazard. Captain Haney confirmed that he would.

Captain Suber recommended that the no-wake zone be year-round rather than seasonal. Chair Jones agreed, stating that people go boating year-round in Florida.

Chair Jones asked whether the Task Force members had any further comments. No member offered further comment.

V. Public Comment

Mr. John Nooney spoke on public access to waterways.

Ms. Lisa Almeida, Freedom Boat Club, spoke on her extensive experience in the Fort George River area, including the environmental changes, the growth of boating, and incidents that have occurred there.

VI. Open Discussion by Invitees

VII. Adjourn

Chair Jones adjourned the meeting at 1:49 p.m.

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