



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Parks & Recreation Department

RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 10, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 PM

Present: Lauren Watkins, Brad Long, Casey Van Rysdam, Marty McEachean, Bill Bower and Harold Dockins, Sarah Taylor, Assistant County Administrator, Paul Abbatonozzi, School Board Liaison, Ryan Kane, Director, Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, Teddy Meyer, Recreation Facilities Manager, Diane Gorski, Project Specialist

Absent: Deb Chapin

Chair called for a motion to approve the March minutes. Motion by Bowen, seconded by McEachean, and approved 5/0.

Chair opened the floor for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and reminded everyone that each speaker would be given 3 minutes.

Al Abbatiello, Chairman of the William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Management Council provided background on the Councils interest in preserving the Switzerland Community Center and there hope that the county recognizes the importance of preserving the site and providing a community center for the public. Baccari provided a history of the project and shared that she would be going back to the Northwest Communication Tower Committee for match funding for inspection of the building and potentially a design. A brief conversation followed.

NEW BUSINESS

Lauren Watkins, Chair thanked everyone for providing their regional park priority rankings and criteria. She encouraged the RAB members to attend the budget hearings if available. She stated that she was unable to attend the first public meeting on May 23, 2023.

CHRIS JANUCHOWSKI, CREEKS SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION (CSA)

Januchowski provided an overview of the girls' softball program. There are over 400 players that make up the 29 CSA softball teams. He said that it unfortunate that the program has to turn girls away due to the shortage of softball fields. He stated that CSA and Creeks Athletic Association have always contributed funds towards maintaining the fields and said that youth sports partners were fully vested in the care and maintenance of the athletic facilities. He hoped the county would recognize their contributions versus other non-partner field users who did not contribute to the maintenance of the fields. He asked if access to the Field of Dreams could be revisited since the special needs program only used the field 12 weeks out of the year. Baccari stated that Parks & Recreation was keenly aware of the need for athletic fields throughout the county and recognized the value of youth sports partners and their contributions. A brief discussion followed. Baccari stated that staff would look into the Field of Dreams request.

GREAT RACE - VINTAGE CAR RALLY (JUNE 24 2023)

Teddy Meyer, Facilities Maintenance Manager provided an overview of the event and grant application. Houston Gibson spoke via ZOOM on behalf of the event. He explained that the event took place in a number of cities and that the request was for the St. Augustine location only. He explained how the event was managed. He said that the attendees would be staying at the Renaissance of World Golf Village Hotel and that many social events were planned during the 4 days leading up to the race. Events are open to the public. He stated that the event would bring a 140 participants and an estimated 4,000 spectators all of which would contribute financially to the area through hotel stays, shopping and restaurant visits. A brief discussion about the merits of this event followed. Great Race (June 24, 2023) awarded \$20,000. Motion by Chapin, seconded Van Rysdam, and approved 5/0 with the contingency that a video link to St. Johns County would be included.

New Croquet Facility Request

John Rice reviewed his request for the County to provide land, build and maintain a public croquet facility. He provided a PowerPoint presentation that covered the history of croquet, the game and the courts needed. Rice stated that there were no public croquet courses in St. Johns County and that he and his wife were members of the Ponte Vedra Croquet Club and it was expensive. He shared that they had to drive 45 minutes each way to play and that they wanted somewhere closer to home to play. Van Rysdam asked what it would cost to build a croquet facility. Rice stated that he wasn't sure what the cost of the project would be or the maintenance. Watkins asked Rice to work with staff to determine the cost of the capital project and annual maintenance and thanked him for his proposal and presentation. Discussion ensued. Van Rysdam asked what building 4 courts would cost and Rice answered that it depended on what type of course was built. Watkins asked Sarah Taylor, Assistant County Administrator for next steps. Taylor stated that Rice should continue to work with Parks and Recreation staff to determine costs and feasibility of the project since they already had a business plan in place. No action was taken.

Van Rysdam asked if this proposed plan fit with golf course and disc golf. He asked about how generated revenue would be handled. Rice answered that they would create a St. Johns County Croquet Club and that the club would host, manage and take in the income from the events. Van Rysdam stated that the maintenance would be burdened by the county. Rice said that the plan is to share operational cost some day.

Suggest Mill Creek Park Name for Turnbull Parcel

Baccari asked the RAB to consider recommending Mill Creek Park as the name for the Turnbull Parcel. She explained that the new Library being built next to Pacetti Bay Middle School was going to be named Mill Creek Library and that Parks & Recreation would like to be consistent with naming county facilities. Van Rysdam mentioned Mill Creek being important to the community and supported the request. There was a consensus of the RAB to recommend naming the proposed athletic facility on the Turnbull parcel Mill Creek Park. Watkins will provide a letter of support to be given to the Board of County Commissioners.

Prioritizing the Four New Proposed Regional Parks

Watkins asked Commissioner Whitehurst if he would be okay with the RAB asking the Parks and Recreation Department to do research on what a sponsorship program would like in St. Johns County. She said that the sponsorship proposal should reflect the values of St. Johns County and other important criteria. Commissioner Whitehurst answered that he thought this was a wonderful idea. She asked Jamie to present staff's findings to the RAB in May.

Watkins thanked the RAB for submitting their rankings and criteria on the four proposed regional parks. She stated that the 5/7 RAB members ranked the Central St. Johns Sportplex #1. She shared the criteria for rankings: closing gaps in locations where things are missing, cost, size, amenities, and space for inside and outside sports. Watkins asked

Whitehurst if the RAB could confirm the #1 choice as it was also the Parks and Recreation's first choice and then revisit the other three locations and rank them using the new criteria. Whitehurst stated that the Central St. Johns Sportplex was the best opportunity to meet the most needs in the short term. He said that he thought it was wise to work in that direction and reevaluate the other three parks. Van Rysdam suggested making the discussion on what is known but allowing flexibility in changing the priority based on facts and circumstances. McEachean concurred that flexibility was key. He reiterated that knowing what questions should be asked was essential. Whitehurst mentioned that the Northeast parcel had some complications such as the PGA Tour having the rights to park on developed parcel. He agreed that it was important to be able to change the ranking. Baccari said that the department will come back next month with recommendations at the May meeting that will include additional information about each parcel. She asked Watkins to recap the criteria. Van Rysdam asked if it the county could reach out the developers. Baccari stated that this would align with a sponsorship policy. Watkins said this could be discussed within the next item.

Watkins recapped the criteria:

- Geo gaps (areas lacking amenities)
- Cost
- Youth Sports Association needs
- Facility size and amenities
- Meeting demands of organized sports
- Offering new recreation opportunities, including non-organized recreational opportunities for youth
- Having space available that may not be part of organized sports
- Proximity to the communities
- Close to elementary schools (Central Community Park)
- Trails
- Multipurpose fields
- Community center
- Pickleball courts

Chapin said she didn't provide criteria because it was hard to know the feasibility of the park not knowing costs.

OLD BUSINESS

Growth Management Meeting Relating to the Comprehensive Plan & Land Development Code

Baccari shared that she, Kane, and Watkins met with Growth Management for some direction on clarification on the current Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code. They identified areas that do not address recreational needs in the zoning of residential parcels and current Level of Service requirements. Currently, not all residential zoning districts require recreational amenities. Baccari stated that the most frequent occurrence where the recreational requirements are triggered is within an approved Planned Unit Development (PUD) or in a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) which is no longer being built. She said that within the Comprehensive Plan there is a minimum level of service that is carried into the Land Development Code as these documents work hand in hand with each other. Baccari explained that the recommendation from Growth Management was to begin looking at recommended changes to the minimum level of service required within the Comprehensive plan. Baccari said that staff will begin researching what other counties and the St. Johns County School district require. She stated that staff will research current state-level guidelines within the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and work with legal to explore what types of requirements can be put in place to support the future growth of parks and recreation as development continues to grow. Discussion followed.

STAFF REPORTS

Jamie Baccari, Parks and Recreation Assistant Director provided these department updates:

- Current Beach Pass Sales compared to last year's numbers during same time frame up 4.5%.
- A big thank you to Marty and Bill who represented the RAB at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center 15 year celebration.
- North Beach Park public meeting input being implemented in playground design.
- Tortuga Park meetings with Commissioners resulted in suggestions for better access entry and parking.
- Bert Watson sign installation and future dedication will be scheduled in the near future.
- The Bird Island Park aerator was installed in the pond.
- The Bird Island Park walkway refurbishment is fully funded and is being handled by the SJC Facility Maintenance Department

BOARD REPORTS

Bill Bowen asked the RAB to consider going paperless. He said that viewing the meeting documents electronically made sense both for the environment and staff. Watkins and McEachean shared that they thought this was a great idea. Van Rysdam stated that he saw the benefits of electronic documents and said that it would save staff time. Chapin said that she preferred a hard copy and did not want to print it herself but was willing to give it a try. There was a consensus of the RAB to go paperless at the May meeting with all documentation being sent out via email. Staff will provide a hard copy of the 1 page agenda on meeting day.

Bowen mentioned how enjoyable the Solomon Calhoun celebration was and was pleased that the celebration was a success. St. Johns Disc Golf Club is partnering with Parks & Recreation to provide a Veteran's Clinic that will include disabled veterans. He stated that this event would be challenging and worthwhile. He said that there is a beginner's clinic at the end of April. McEachean said that he would like to volunteer with programs for veterans and Baccari replied that Parks and Recreation is partnering with the Veteran's Hospital and suggested he reach out to our Community Program Manager Tess Simpson to get him clearance as a volunteer.

Marty McEachean thanked Commissioner Arnold and Jamie Baccari for the great job they did speaking at the 15th Solomon Calhoun Celebration. He shared that he appreciated learning the history of the area and what future plans are in store for the community.

Watkins thanked everyone for their input and asked for a motion to adjourn. Chapin made the motion to adjourn and was seconded by Van Rysdam. Motion passed 5/0.