



RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 14, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 PM

Board Members Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair; Brad Long, Vice Chair; Bill Bowen, Harold Dockins, Marithza Ross and Casey Van Rysdam. Absent - Marty McEachean

Recreation Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; Carrie Miska, Business Manager; Teddy Meyer, Parks/Rec Facilities Manager; Bobby McFarland, Sports Tourism Development Specialist and Diane Gorski, Project Specialist

Also present: Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, School District Liaison David Simpkins

Approval of the Minutes

Chair called for approval of the December 13, 2023 & January 10, 2024 meeting minutes. Motion by Dockins, seconded by Bowen and approved 6/0 with the name correction noted in the December minutes.

Public Comments

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

Susanne Clulow provided her address and thanked the RAB for their service and the Recreation Department's hard work and continued efforts in providing park and recreation facilities to the residents of St. Johns County.

Reports

Christian Whitehurst, County Commission Liaison shared that he had attended the opening day of Creeks Athletic Association's Baseball season. He shared his enthusiasm for the hard work and commitment of the athletic association to provide youth with opportunities to play sports. He was impressed with what a great job the Parks and Recreation Department does in maintaining the fields and partnerships with the youth associations.

David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison shared that the School District honored all of the state champions in swimming and golf that included over 50 students. He provided updates on the winter sports programs (basketball, girls basketball, boys & girls soccer teams, girls weight lifting, wrestling and competitive cheer many of which are in the state play offs). There was a discussion regarding the success of the new High Schools. Dockins asked why St. Johns County doesn't involve students in the Fort Mose enactment programs. Simpkins explained that field studies were limited due to academic testing requirements. He suggested Dockins send him the information and he would share it with school administration.

Lauren Watkins, Chair reviewed the Fiscal Year meeting calendar provided in the agenda packet.

Recommendation to the BOCC to fill the RAB District 2 Expired Term

The Chair announced that the District 2 RAB term had expired. She explained that current District 2 Representative Brad Long was one of three applicants up for consideration. She asked if the other applicants were in attendance and Christian Jorgenson announced that he was present. The Chair asked each applicant to give provide their qualifications and share their reasons for wanting to be on the RAB. Both men provided a brief overview of their careers, civic involvement, and interests to the RAB. The Chair called for a vote. A ballot and envelope were provided to each RAB member. Staff collected the sealed ballots, opened and tallied them and provided the Director with the results. The Director announced that there were four (4) votes in favor of recommending Brad Long for an additional four year term and that Jorgenson and Geisler each received one (1) vote. The Chair said that she would sign a letter of recommendation for consideration by the Board of County Commissioners for Brad Long to be given an additional term.

New Staff Introductions

Watkins called the new **Beach Toll Supervisor, Dean Walker** to the floor. Walker introduced himself and provided an overview of his background, career, family and experience. He shared that he was responsible for over 50 part-time employees that work at 8 beach toll booth access points for drivers to access over 12 miles of beach. Toll collections of over 1.2 million per year goes towards paying for law enforcement, marine rescue, PSA wages, beach walk overs and trash and recycling collection services. He announced that this year would be the first year for using a point of sale system to accept credit card payments. He further explained that staff will be scanning all new incoming cars and capturing the number of people visiting our beaches for the first time. He said that the live data will allow us to know how many people are on the beach at any point in the day. He mentioned installing new toll booths with solar panels and charging capabilities. The group discussed the new point of sale system and credit card payments at great length. An additional discussion about 4-wheel drive recommended access, signage and public notice followed. Kane emphasized the safety aspect of credit card payments and the goal to speed up beach entry. He explained that the need for beach operations and staffing continues to grow and that funding is always a challenge as the population in the county continues to increase and St. Augustine

Tracy Leahy, Recreation Pier Supervisor introduced herself and provided an overview of her family and 22+ year career in customer service. She explained pier operations. She shared that the shop is fully staffed with happy, smiling people and their common goal is to take care of the community and visitors and make every visit memorable. She said that her goal is for the pier to be more involved in community events. She mentioned that they set up a booth for the 4th of July Fireworks show and sold hotdogs, hamburgers and hot chocolate and was successful. She shared some statistics with the group: 197 annual passes were sold in 2023 and that starting this year the pier would be selling annual passes, not seasonal. As of January 1 this year, 86 passes have been sold. She announced the introduction of the new annual sightseeing family pass that allows families the opportunity to visit the pier and experience the ocean and wildlife an unlimited amount of times throughout the year. She said last year's admission gross sales were over \$220,000 which equals 91,000 paid visitors' that accounts for 34% of toll sales. Resale items totaled \$217,000 in sales or 33% of toll sales. Food and Beverage sales equaled \$118,000 of 18% of toll sales. Watkins asked the price breakdown for annual passes. Bowen asked for a price breakdown to fish from the pier. Kane clarified that sightseeing did not include fishing. Leahy listed all of the items sold in the Pier Shop. Discussion regarding the types of ice cream, smoothies and milkshakes followed. Dockins asked for clarification on access to the pier. Van Rysdam asked about potential alcohol sales at the pier. Leahy stated that alcohol is prohibited on the beach. He asked for the pier numbers to be included in the dashboard using the previous year for comparison. He asked how inventory was handled. He asked if cost analysis has occurred to help increase the profit in the shop. Leahy explained how sale items are priced. Watkins asked about the operating hours at the shop and pier and the website. Miska explained that county is in the process of revamping the website countywide. Watkins asked about the types of events that could occur at the pier. Discussion ensued.

Special Event Applications

Watkins asked if staff was going to give a presentation related to the special event applications. Director Kane responded that these events are held annually. He explained that the Easter Sunrise Services were the catalyst for requesting a legacy policy, however, direction from legal and administration is to accept applications and schedule first come, first served. He said that Seaside Church would be replacing the group that has traditionally offered this service as they submitted their application first. Watkins asked for staff to make sure that Crescent Beach Baptist updated their Certificate of Insurance. She then requested a motion to approve all three special event applications. Dockins made a motion to approve all three Sunrise Services applications (Crescent Beach Baptist Church – Crescent Beach, Sunrise Services; Ponte Vedra Presbyterian Church – Mickler's Beach, Sunrise Services; Seaside Church - Vilano Beach, Sunrise Services) and was seconded by Bowen. Motion passed 6/0.

Watkins asked if there were any questions about the Game On Triathlon events. Van Rysdam asked if the events would remain the same as the previous year. He asked for post event reporting. Kane replied that the events remained the same and the SJSO provides post event reports. Watkins asked for a motion to approve all three triathlon events. Long made a motion to approve all three triathlon events (Game On Triathlon: Vilano Beach - May 19, 2024; Vilano Beach - July 28, 2024; Mickler's Beach - October 13, 2024) and was seconded by Dockins. Motion passed 6/0.

Sports Event Funding Cat III Recreation & Leisure Sport Marketing Grant Application Recommendations

Teddy Meyer reviewed the year's long process of revamping the grant application. He mentioned moving into the portal system and redoing the criteria and guidelines on how grant allotments are decided. Questions 1-6 were presented by Bobby McFarland who explained that changes to the questions were based on the feedback he was given from the RAB and TDC. He summarized the changes that included:

- Applicants are required to use the TDC logo and embed the TDC event video in their website
- Added a new question related to Projected hotel room nights by capacity
- What type of Impact the event will have on local users
- Updating scoring method
- Maximum funding available

McFarland reviewed the Panel Plan option that included Meyers, McFarland, John Tharpe, VCB and an appointed RAB member. The panel would review the applications with staff presenting a spreadsheet that includes the scores and the qualified grant amount to the RAB. The presentation would go over dates, type of event, and new events. Post event information will be collected and reviewed and if the project info is substantially different than the application, funding can be lowered based on scoring/funding criteria.

Meyer explained that the goal is for the process to be similar to the TDC method so that the portal system works in concert with both groups. The group discussed the grant application and options at great length. They agreed that Community Impact needed to be added to the application and other changes identified during today's discussion. The chair gained a consensus to table this item and have staff provide the changes, further recommendations, examples and additional information at next month's meeting. Further discussion regarding the RAB having a more active role in the grant process ensued. Staff will bring back this item in April.

Staff Reports

Ryan Kane, Director

- Canright House relocation. Staff has been tasked to evaluate other potential locations for the historical and to make a recommendation to administration ASAP as the homeowner has given an April 1st deadline to move the house.
- A Shore Drive Trail public meeting is scheduled at the Southeast Library at 5 PM tonight. This project is scheduled to go before the BCC on March 5th.
- The Take Pride in the Parks Campaign to reduce vandalism within the county parks through community involvement is currently scheduled to be launched by the Public Affairs Office at the end of March or beginning of April. There was a brief discussion about vandalism in the parks. Baccari stated that vandalism in the parks cost over \$90,000 last year. This expense is paid using our Deferred Maintenance budget which reduces funds available for much needed maintenance projects.
- Treaty Park and Alpine Groves Park improvement project funding was approved by the BCC on January 16th.
- The BCC voted to approve updated to the Beach Code Ordinance to include policies for operating E-Bikes in a safe manner and planes and drones are forbidden from taking off or landing on the beach.
- Kane provided an update on the department's Capital Improvement projects.
- Comprehensive Plan public involvement in the works.

Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director

- FCT Grant application for the San Sebastian River property scored 1st and is eligible for \$3 million grant dollars. Staff will request the BCC accept the funding and disperse as required.
- The Parks & Rec Public Affairs Specialist is sharing everything that is going on with the department on social media and through press releases.

RAB Member Reports

Van Rysdam thanked Sarah Taylor for being actively involved in the RAB by attending the meetings. He expressed his hope that the new liaison would continue this effort. He also asked about the site fee policy and process for review and discussion and hoped that staff would schedule this on a future agenda.

Bowen shared that he met several St. Augustine South resident opposed to the St. Augustine Trail, most of which live on Shore Drive. He said that residents in the other parts of the neighborhood appeared to support the project. Ross spoke to the importance of making decisions that are for the greater good and meet the needs of the majority.

Dockins motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Bowen. Motion passed 6/0.