

RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

June 14, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 PM

Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair, Brad Long, Vice Chair, Bill Bowen and Harold Dockins, Sarah Taylor, Assistant County Administrator, Paul Abbatonozzi, School Board Liaison, Ryan Kane, Director, Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, Nathan Otter, Natural Resources Superintendent, Teddy Meyer, Recreation Facilities Manager, Carrie Miska, Business Manager, Diane Gorski, Project Specialist

Absent: Deb Chapin, Casey Van Rysdam, Marty McEachean (arrived at 2:22 p.m.)

Long motioned to approve the May minutes and was seconded by Bowen. Motion passed 4/0.

Chair opened the floor for Public Comments and there were none.

Lauren Watkins, Chair welcomed everyone to the new meeting location. She mentioned that staff had provided a meeting calendar with today's handouts. She encouraged members of the RAB to join her in attending the memorial dedication in honor of Bert Watson on Saturday, June 24th at 10 a.m. at Mills Field Park. Watkins invited everyone to attend the Commissioner Meeting on June 20 at 8:30 a.m. for refreshments before the 9 a.m. Commission meeting where staff would honor Eddie Vickers by inducting him into the Recreation Hall of Fame as well as for the reading of the Proclamation for Parks and Recreation month. She stated that she would be meeting with the gentleman from West Augustine that presented at last month's meeting to see how she could help their programming. It was advised that no other RAB member attend the meeting unless it was going to be advertised due to Government in the Sunshine rules.

Commissioner Whitehurst shared that he and Ryan Kane met with the neighbors that backed the Mills Field Park field that was slated to be lighted and the neighbors supported the effort. He shared that the Office of Management and Budget was working on finding funding for three of the four proposed regional parks and that bonding was one possibility.

NEW BUSINESS

Jalisa Ferguson, Assistant County Attorney provided a PowerPoint Presentation that reviewed the purpose and primary responsibility of the Recreation Advisory, the Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law and Public Records Act. Discussion followed.

Chuck Wharton, resident and avid disc golf player was here on behalf of the St. Augustine Disc Golf Club. He shared his background on the club and its contributions to the Moccasin Creek Disc Golf Course. He encouraged the county to add disc golf courses in the proposed regional parks. He said that disc golf is a booming sport and it is popular among the general public. It is a lifetime fitness sport. He shared that players of all ages were actively involved in the sport. He covered statistics throughout the country. He stated that disc golf courses can be built on underutilized spaces. He explained that neighbors help keep watch over the neighborhood. He emphasized the opportunity for tourism with new courses and the need for smaller courses throughout the community. Q & A between Bowen and Wharton followed.

Bob Stanton, resident of St. Augustine Shores, does not play disc golf, but he served on the Board of Directors for many years. He spoke about the development of the Aragon Disc Golf Course in St. Augustine Shores and the many benefits that resulted in its creation. He said the course offers pride in ownership for the residents in the neighborhood and has resulted in the

reduction of vandalism in the neighborhood. He shared that the course is always occupied. He encouraged the County to build not only the upcoming tournament-level disc golf course at the Golf course but also to build smaller, more versatile disc golf courses throughout the community. A discussion about the success of the Aragon course, disc golf as a growing sport and the many options and opportunities for building new courses.

Mike, Ancient City Picklers provided a brief overview of the organization, their passion for the sport, and appreciation for the work that the County has done on the courts. He followed with a PowerPoint Presentation that focused on the need for additional pickleball courts at Ron Parker Park. He stated that players can wait over an hour to gain access to a court and that the lack of courts is the reason they cannot have tournaments or other organized play at the facility. He said that the county should consider converting one tennis court into pickleball courts. He encouraged the county to add additional courts at Ron Parker Park and elsewhere on the island and said that additional pickleball courts were needed all over St. Johns County. Discussion followed.

Ryan Kane, Director of Parks & Recreation stated that the department was aware of the need for additional courts and said that tennis players were starting to feel squeezed out. He said that the department was monitoring courts to see how they are being utilized. He reviewed the pickleball report summary that was provided to the RAB. The group discussed the potential locations for additional courts within the county.

Watkins announced that the two grant applications on the agenda were the last for Fiscal Year 2023 and that 8-10 applications would be presented at the August meeting as the RAB transitions to the TDC schedule and application portal in Fiscal Year 2024.

Teddy Meyer, Recreation Facility Manager reviewed the Florida Elite Soccer Academy (FESA) grant application request for \$10,000 the same amount they were awarded in 2022 for tournaments planned August 18-20 and 25-26, 2023. He introduced Sean Bubb, Executive Director. Bubb reviewed the soccer club's purpose and success in growing its membership in the organization. He gave an overview of the tournament and its economic impact on the community. He shared that the grant money would be used to provide opportunities to those children who want to play soccer but cannot afford to. Conversations relating to the club and its impact on the community followed. Long motioned to grant \$10,000 and the motion was seconded by Dockins. Motion approved 4/0.

Meyers reviewed the Lion's Gate Academy's Martial Arts grant application request for \$9,500 for the Ancient City Championship tournament for August 25-26, 2023. He stated that this was a first-time ask and that it was in line with the request previously reviewed for The Great Race. Jose Leno explained his passion for martial arts and hopes to continue to provide access to young and old. He shared information about Lion's Den Academy located at World Golf Village. He said that he hopes to bring the USA Sport Karate competition circuit to St. Johns County and create an annual Martial Arts travel destination. He plans to further develop Martial Arts for everyone in St. Johns County and surrounding areas. Leon stated that they hope to have over 250 competitors from 80 karate schools and 500 spectators. The event kicks off on Friday night with seminars led by renowned martial artists and the tournament Saturday in the gymnasium at Mill Creek Academy. They plan to develop the Ancient City Championship into a multi-day competition event and eventually move to the St. Johns County Convention Center. Discussion relating to sport and the competition ensued. Motion by Watkins to award \$9,500 was seconded by McEachean and passed 5/0.

OLD BUSINESS

Jamie Baccari, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director provided RAB members with the revised Parks and Recreation Sponsorship policy for review and input. She explained that the county already has a Naming Policy and that this additional policy would allow for different levels of requests for Parks and Recreation Assets. She stated that the Board of County Commissioners

will always decide what to name a park and whether or not funds can be accepted to develop an asset. Baccari said that the policy would be brought back in July for further discussion.

STAFF REPORTS

Ryan Kane, Parks & Recreation Director provided these updates:

- Invited everyone to the Tuesday BOCC meeting Parks and Recreation month and Eddie Vickers induction to HOF 6/20 at 8:30 a.m.
- Pickleball at Cornerstone Park. One tennis court will be lined for two pickleball courts with portable nets. He mentioned the six pickleball courts at Veteran's replacing basketball courts.
- The Department is evaluating legacy users of facilities and will be developing a policy to bring to the RAB for review.
- Reviewed the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Requests as compared to prior years' funding. He mentioned budget goals:
 1. Increase in lower-level pay to become more competitive.
 2. Establishing funding to reduce vandalism within the parks. Take Pride in Your Park Campaign in concert with the St. Johns County Sheriff's Department. Cameras have been added to some locations and will continue to be added as funds are made available.
 3. New asset inventory system is being introduced.
 4. Increase in services, programming and staff to assist with growth.
 5. Completion of existing projects that need additional funding.

Kane summarized each department's budget categories. RAB members' questions were answered. Whitehurst asked about beach toll numbers and Baccari said information would be provided next month.

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

- Parks and Recreation Month/Eddie Vickers Hall of Fame Induction June 20
- Bert Watson Memorial June 24
- Summer camp is in full swing. Baccari will provide numbers in July.
- Park Maintenance is moving towards an online inventory/asset system called City Source with support from Administration.

McEachean apologized for being late. He stated that he was spending time with the United Way and that good things are happening. McEachean said the Commissioners are really listening to constituents and getting things done.

Long said that the Park Foundation hired an Executive Director and that he will attend the July RAB meeting.

Watkins called for a motion to at 3:40 p.m. Motion by Dockins, seconded by Long and approved 5/0.