



Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes August 13, 2025

Call to Order

Members Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair, Bill Bowen, George Vancore, Harold Dockins, and Casey Van Rysdam.

Members Absent: Brad Long, Vice Chair and Jason Trent

Also Present: Commission Chair Krista Joseph and David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison

Recreation Staff Present: Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, Carrie Miska, Business Manager, Bobby McFarland, Sports Tourism Development Specialist and Diane Gorski, Project Specialist/Liaison

Approval of the Minutes

Watkins called for approval of June 11, 2025, meeting minutes. Bowen motioned to approve the minutes and received a second from Dockins. Motion passed 5/0.

Public Comments

The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items. Margo Geer, St. Johns County resident, spoke to the need for the Shore Drive Trail to be built. She expressed concerns over pedestrian safety and asked the RAB to urge the Board of County Commissioners to build the trail. A brief discussion followed.

Gus Calado, Planet Swim owner, swimming enthusiast and former collegiate all-star nationally recognized swimmer, spoke to the need to expand aquatics within St. Johns County. He provided an overview of business operations in Nocatee and mentioned wanting to expand their footprint.

Reports

Simpkins reported that there are over 55,000 students registered in the St. Johns County School District and over 6,500 employees. He mentioned that a K-8 on SR 16A was opened this year and two more will open in 2026-2027. He provided the Football Season Kickoff schedule for Friday. Public access on Wednesdays in July and August was well attended countywide. He announced that the new AstroTurf field will be unveiled at the Ponte Vedra High School home game against rival school Neese on Friday August 22, 2025. Joseph asked if Beachside Highschool swim team found a place to practice and Simpkins replied that he did not know what was worked out. He said finding a pool is always a challenge for High School teams since there are no pools on campus. Joseph asked the Planet Swim representative how they handled scheduling pool access for high school teams. Discussion followed. Vancore asked Simpkins to explain the relationship between St. Johns County Schools and the St. Johns Middle School Sports Athletic Association. Simpkins explained that middle school sports are not offered through the school district. The Middle School Athletic Association provides sports opportunities to middle school students throughout the county working with the school district and Parks & Rec for field allocation.

Commission Chair Joseph reported that she had just attended a Library Board meeting, where she learned about the strong partnership between the Library and Parks & Recreation departments. She conveyed the Library Board's appreciation for the positive working relationship with Parks & Recreation and highlighted how well the two departments collaborate. Joseph expressed enthusiasm for the co-location of libraries within new regional park designs and emphasized the value of this integrated approach. She recommended that Kane continue to include libraries in all future park projects where feasible, to support community access and interdepartmental synergy.

Watkins introduced the St. Johns County Park Foundation Director Marithza Ross who provided an update on the Foundation.

Ross shared that the Foundation was able to raise nearly \$30,000 during Parks and Rec Month July with the Tesori Family Foundation providing a \$25,000 donation as the first major donor. She said that the donations for Foundation President Brad Long's fundraiser were appreciated. She announced that the Foundation was halfway toward their goal of raising funds for the Field of Dreams turf field replacement. She mentioned a partnership with a resident led group desiring to replace the playground at Bird Island Park and said that she was working with the county to determine what fits in that space. She covered the Foundation wish list for Park Partners' \$25,000 donorships to provide support throughout the year. She stated that they continue to look for donors and have a few slots for small title sponsors for a variety of upcoming programs and volunteers. She explained the Foundation is the official philanthropic partner of the St. Johns County Parks & Rec Department whose purpose is to create spaces that are welcoming and accessible to all members of the community, fostering wellness, connection and enjoyment for everyone. The Foundation is committed to preserving and maintaining county parks and to creating private partnerships as well as community engagement to strengthen & sustain parks and recreational spaces. The goal is for the Foundation to be self-sustaining while having a meaningful impact on the county park and recreation spaces. A brief Q&A followed.

RAB Member Reports

Vancore announced that the FOD park is expanding, and that significant progress has been made on the infrastructure work and modifications for a new parking lot, concession stand, 4 ADA restrooms and a storage unit. He mentioned the Field of Dreams Baseball Organization is providing \$80k towards purchasing equipment for the concession stand. He mentioned there are several sponsors signing up to assist with funding. He said he notified the FOD parents about the ADA access points within the county and the families are very happy to learn of this.

Dockins thanked the department for the Popsicles in the Park events. He said his granddaughter really enjoyed it. He mentioned that he is a fast walker and medaled in the Senior Games. He announced that he is running Race Walk/Power Walk Clinics Mon/Thu from September 8 to September 18 at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center Gymnasium to help residents train for the upcoming Endless Summer 5k Run/Walk on Anastasia Park Beach in November.

Van Rysdam asked for an update on the Shore Drive Trail project. He asked the RAB to offer their support in building the trail. He asked for an update on the Strategic Plan and Commissioner Joseph said that the plan was complete. He asked about the KPI's included in the strategic plan related to recreation that he had requested from staff during the June meeting. Baccari stated that she would work with Miska to get that information out.

TDT Category III Grant Allocation Review Panel Recommendations

McFarland provided a brief overview of the grant funding recommendations of the review panel. Van Rysdan asked for clarification for the increased funding recommendation for Prime and McFarland explained that more hotel

rooms in St. Johns County were being booked. A brief discussion about the grant process, grant funding amounts and the continuing quest to add new events followed. The second grant cycle will be reviewed in January. Watkins explained the online review process and said it has been streamlined. There was a motion by Vancore, that was seconded by Bowen, to approve the allocations. Motion passed 5/0.

Fees

Baccari asked to table this topic to next month since staff are still gathering data, creating scenarios, and examining impacts and leadership needs to meet with administration. Van Rysdam asked for data that includes all fees charged by Parks and Recreation. There was a consensus to table this item for future consideration.

Sports Association Participation Number Update

Baccari provided a four-year recap and breakdown of participation numbers annually (2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025) and fees collected. This data includes St. Johns County residents and out-of-county participants. She explained the methodology and said that this would be the reporting method going forward. The group discussed the information presented, trends and future business models. Van Rysdam asked if there was a formal policy for fee waivers and suggested they be standardized and published. He also asked what happens to associations refusing to pay their fees. Baccari responded that no actions are being taken at this time. Van Rysdam urged the department to consider consequences for those who do not pay. The accuracy of reporting participation numbers, resident vs. non-resident, recruiting and field allocation was discussed.

Staff Reports

Baccari thanked the Parks Foundation and programming division for the phenomenal job they did for July Parks and Rec month. She shared that the Solomon Calhoun football field was nearing completion and that the North Beach Park, Field of Dreams and four new regional park projects were underway. She mentioned capital improvement projects, and the FY 26 budget was being prepared for presentation. She mentioned she would be bringing the revamped partnership agreement to the RAB soon. She said that the Shore Drive Trail was in the process of being redesigned. Van Rysdam asked for an update to be presented to the RAB and Baccari replied that this will be included in the September meeting. She gave an update on the status of the San Sebastian Boat Ramp Park project.

Watkins thanked Diane for providing the press releases relating to Parks and Recreation with the RAB and mentioned that Jamie's reports will not include these items. Vancore expressed his appreciation for the information and said that he has been sharing the press releases with Creeks Athletic Association.

There was a motion by Vancore and a second by Bowen to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried 5/0.