



## Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes May 14, 2025

### Call to Order

Members Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair, Brad Long, Vice Chair, Bill Bowen, George Vancore, Harold Dockins, Jason Trent and Casey Van Rysdam.

Also Present: Commission Chair Krista Joseph

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

Watkins asked Long to run the meeting, and he accepted.

### Approval of the Minutes

Long called for approval of April 9, 2025, meeting minutes and received a motion from Bowen who was seconded by Dockins. Motion passed 7/0.

### Public Comments

The Vice Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items and Suzanne Clulow, St. Johns County resident, introduced herself. Clulow provided her thoughts about the county budget and the budgeting process and offered her suggestions for improvements to the process. She asked for more detailed information to be provided in the budget. She applauded the Parks and Rec Department's budget presentation to the County Administrator and thanked the RAB for their service. Van Rysdam said that he would like the RAB to be more involved in the budgeting process. Kane explained the budgeting process and referenced the copy of the budget presentation provided to the RAB. He said the RAB is a sounding board for the department and input is always welcome. He explained that he had hoped to provide the RAB with the budget prior to it being presented to Administration but the dates did not line up. Van Rysdam said that he believed the RAB should play a more important role in guiding the department's budget and questioned whether this was one of the core functions of the RAB. Dockins asked for clarification on the presentation, specifically the maintenance and other lines. Kane explained operating budgets and Capital Improvement Project budgets.

### Reports

**Commissioner Joseph** announced that the Parks and Recreation Department provided one of the best budget presentations. She said the department showed where the revenue could come from and provided roll back data demonstrating possible savings for the community. She explained that impact fees need to stay in specific areas. She said the county is using bonds to fund projects countywide. She said that the RAB can email her anytime about the budget. She explained that the County Administrators budget process excluded input from the commissioners and that the best

time for RAB to provide input is now and throughout the year. Van Rysdam wants to see the RAB's role expand during the budget process prior to the presentation given to the County Administrator. Joseph explained that the County Administrator controlled the process and suggested that anyone that is not happy with the process reach out to Ms. Andrews. She suggested Van Rysdam email Andrews directly with his concerns. Joseph shared her amazing experiences at the opening day of the Field of Dreams and said she was proud of everyone involved. She mentioned adding little libraries at the parks and suggested Kane coordinate the possibilities with the library going forward.

**Watkins** said that she would draft a letter of concern relating to the dire need for additional summer camp locations on behalf of the RAB and provide it to the RAB at the June meeting. She said that she would also work on the percentages and updating the metrics on the strategic dashboard spreadsheet and provide to Miska before the next meeting.

### RAB Member Reports

**Van Rysdam** said the RAB was expecting a June update on metrics related to the Strategic Plan like Key Performance Indicators. He asked the department to set up metrics to determine what can be done to improve and be successful. Baccari explained that this was already underway, and departments are working on defining the objectives and the reporting timeline. She stated that the metrics were established by the BCC workshop and the department is in the process of developing the method to be used to meet the objectives. She stated that the department will keep the RAB informed of the process and give them the opportunity to weigh in. She said that staff should be able to present something in June or July.

Dockins said he was waiting to hear from Tess about providing a power walking program at Solomon Calhoun and other locations. Baccari suggested he email Tess directly for an update on the grant.

**Bowen** mentioned the drum runners, car show and disc golf tournament at the fairgrounds last weekend to fundraise for the Shriner's Club. He asked if the Parks & Recreation Department would consider getting involved next year. Baccari suggested he give them Tess's or her contact information to discuss options.

**Vancore** announced the Field of Dreams Baseball season opening and that he appreciated Kane, Baccari and Commission Joseph attending. He said that Creeks Athletic Association (CAA) reached out to him about the lack of availability of field space. He mentioned that the issue appears to be giving all the field space to travel ball and not scheduling fields for recreational ball. He said he would continue working with the association to see what improvements can be made. He mentioned the cost of recreational sports and asked the CAA if they are sponsoring children who are unable to participate because their families can't afford it. He said it was important for these associations to provide opportunities to those less fortunate and hopes to help champion this change in youth sports associations models. Trent asked if this was season specific and Vancore said he had just started looking into it. Van Rysdam mentioned the large number of kids that need help in one of the richest counties in Florida and wondered if the Foundation could solicit scholarships. Long responded that the Foundation was still in the formation stage. Vancore said the organizations should be funding the scholarships, not the Foundation. Kane mentioned associations could do a better job of advertising scholarship opportunities. There was a brief discussion regarding sports scholarships and youth sports partner organizations.

**Long** said that the Foundation has welcomed three new board members. He said that they have been working with an accountant and that they have a framework for a three year budget. He said

that the Foundation continues to work on strengthening the organization. He said Ross is busy with social media, engaging with the public and potential partners and donors.

### Sunset the Northwest Communications Tower Advisory Board with the RAB assuming the conditions set forth in the lease agreement

**Baccari** explained that the Board of County Commissioners has identified some redundancy on their boards and committees and the Northwest Communications Tower Advisory Board was one of them. She stated that the Recreation Advisory Board could assume the responsibility of reviewing grant applications and making recommendations to the BCC based on the strict criteria included in the Communication Tower lease. She emphasized the difficulty in finding members to fill open seats giving the two vacant positions that have remained open for over a year. Commissioner Joseph agreed. Baccari explained that the current members' terms have been sunsetted and restarted several times to keep the committee active. A brief discussion followed. Vancore made a motion to support the sunseting of the Northwest Communications Tower Advisory Board September 30, 2025, with the RAB assuming the responsibilities on October 1, 2025. Bowen seconded the motion. Motion passed 7/0.

### Parks & Recreation Partnership Policy Review

Kane provided a PowerPoint Presentation (attached) that explained the history of Youth Sports Partnerships and the department's policy. A lengthy discussion relating to the youth sports partnerships, participation numbers, fees, growth, field space allocations and maintenance costs ensued. There was a consensus of the RAB to continue to revise the partnership policy, obtain the data necessary to quantify field allocation and review the per player fees for partner vs. the field rental fees paid by non-partner organizations.

### TDT Category 3 Sports Event Grant Application Proposed Questions Review & Approval

**Baccari** shared the recommended questions for inclusion in the grant application. McFarland reviewed the four questions and how they scored in the application. He provided a variety of calculation examples. The grant application process, minimum requirements, advertising and other mandatory requirements to meet for funding consideration were discussed by the group. The group examined the ways in which staff will validate and verify the data provided by the grantees. Long spoke to the benefits achieved in reworking the application and mentioned that the group will be able to make changes in the future if needed. Dockins asked how the department plans on supporting local events. Baccari replied that this would be discussed at a future date as it was an important component. Dockins and Bowen wanted to make sure that local events were given some preference. Baccari agreed and said that the impacts to smaller, local events will be included as alternative options in FY27. Van Rysdam provided his views on how the marketing component should be considered and what provisions could be made to ensure that St. Johns County's logo and video would be included. Commissioner Joseph spoke about the value of keeping the process simple and the benefit of incorporating the TDC requirements in the application resulting in a more cohesive process. Watkins announced that she would be the RAB representative for the upcoming Phase I & II grant application submittal review panel. Dockins made a motion to approve the proposed TDT Cat 3 scoring questions for inclusion in the updated grant application. Vancore seconded the motion. Motion approved 7/0.

## Staff Reports

**Kane** announced that Teddy Meyer had left the County and accepted the position as the TDC Director for Clay County. He then provided the following updates.

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB) presented Sports Tourism Development Specialist **Robert “Bobby” McFarland its prestigious St. Johns County 2024 Tourism and Hospitality Employee of the Year Award on April 24.**

He reviewed the FY26 Budget PowerPoint (attached) that was presented to the County Administrator on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Kane announced upcoming Ribbon Cutting Events are being scheduled for Nocatee Volleyball Courts in June, North Beach Park and Crescent Beach Walkover in July and Solomon Calhoun artificial turf field in September. He shared that upcoming project Groundbreaking Events are planned for the Central Sportsplex in June, DeLeon Shores and Pacetti Bay parks in July and Villages Courts in August.

Kane shared that WFC Ashford Mills (Shearwater) had received park impact fee credits subject to special Condition 31 of their DRI Development Order. He said that the Development Order required the developer to allocate land, clear, grad and stabilize park property and construct multi-purpose field lights. He explained that due to design changes, the County and the Developer have agreed to a \$330,000.00 payment in lieu of constructing the multi-purpose field lights to fulfill the remaining development obligations. At the 5/6/2025 BCC Meeting the board voted to accept and allocate the funds to the Central Community Center Park construction project 7724

Kane provided a recap of the Rock Springs Farms Croquet Public Meeting on 4/29/2025 where the plans for the Rock Springs Farms Park Croquet Fields were discussed and feedback solicited received from the community. The project is set to include a croquet lawn with four fields, a shade structure, parking, and additional restrooms at the existing 2.3-acre park. He stated that there were approximately 60 residents in attendance.

Kane announced the temporary closure dates at the Vilano Boat Ramp due to ongoing dredging operations aimed at improving navigation and safety. Due to narrow channel conditions during low tide and the presence of heavy equipment. *Closed May 12–15 & May 19–22, & May 27–30 if needed. Open May 16-18 & May 23-26.*

The Vilano dredge project will remove approximately 6,000 cubic yards of sediment from the channel and boat basin.

Field of Dreams Baseball, St. Johns County’s disability-friendly baseball field located at Aberdeen Park \$1,513,800 major expansion project is underway. The project’s construction contract was approved by the SJC BCC at the April 15 BCC meeting. To celebrate the start of work on this project, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at 11:30 a.m. on May 3. This coincided with the opening of the FOD Baseball season. The baseball field will have its existing parking lot expanded, and a new concession building with ADA-accessible restrooms will be added.

Kane said that the Parks and Recreation department “Enjoy, Don’t Destroy” Anti-Vandalism Campaign has been successful, He said the department spent \$18,093 on vandalism from April 20204 to March 2025 that resulted in an approximately 60% reduction in repair costs from the previous year.

**Baccari** shared the following programming information. The first History Harvest captured the oral histories of three longtime residents of the Fruit Cove area. It also documented several important documents, various photos, and old articles that related to Alpine Groves and the Bartram Scenic

Highway. There were also several leads to previous oral history projects that were on file at the library that captured the stories of various important families and people. Staff gained a lot of information and stories that can be utilized immediately in our public programming. Staff also gained a lot of feedback about improvements that can be made to better reach key people in the community, and we look forward to another History Harvest in Fruit Cove in the future.

On May 3, the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department welcomed hundreds of guests to Alpine Groves Park (2060 SR-13, Switzerland) for the 2025 Bartram Living History Festival. The festival (formerly known as “Bartram Bash”) celebrates centuries of Floridian history, bringing historical interpreters to teach visitors about the figures and cultures that shaped St. Johns County, along with games and crafts for families, live music, and tours of the park’s historic farmhouse. 2025 saw even more interpreters along the riverfront at Alpine Groves Park, including a blacksmith, and refreshments provided by Salt Run BBQ Food Truck and Sour Filly Drink Truck.

The Annual Easter Egg Hunts were well attended. Area children met & had pictures taken with the Easter Bunny 4/17 at Palencia Park & Veterans Parks and 4/19 at Treaty Park & Al Wilke Parks.

The Kids’ Triathlon on April 27 was a success. Parks & Rec partnered with the Park Foundation. Kids from 5 to 14 swam, biked, and ran while competing in a real, timed triathlon at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center. Three groups were organized by age (5–8, 9–11, and 12–14). Participants received a t-shirt, medal, and official photo.

Mussallem Beachfront Park ribbon-cutting ceremony April 11<sup>th</sup> celebrated the completion of the \$1.5 mil renovation. The renovation expanded parking, added restrooms, changing rooms, cornhole, a walking trail, and an overlook of the nearby marsh. There is a video posted online to commemorate the event.

Parks and Recreation are participating in the annual MAY IS NATIONAL WATER SAFETY MONTH awareness campaign that focuses on promoting water safety and preventing drowning and water-related injuries by posting safety and prevention tips on our social media sites.

There was a motion by Vancore and a second by Dockins to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.