



Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes October 8, 2025

Call to Order

Members Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair, Brad Long, Vice Chair, Casey Van Rysdam, and Jason Trent.

Members Absent: Bill Bowen, George Vancore, Harold Dockins

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

Approval of the Minutes

Watkins called for approval of September 10, 2025, meeting minutes. Long motioned to approve the minutes and received a second from Trent. Motion passed 4/0.

Public Comments

The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items. She explained that everyone would get (3) three minutes to speak and that all questions would be held until after the RAB Member Reports. Resident John Ellison shared his interest in adding disc golf courses in the northern part of the county. He shared that he thought courses could be added to existing facilities at a low cost. He offered his help in getting disc golf courses built. Bruce Milliken resident of St. Augustine South asked for a bulk mailing from the RAB sharing relevant news, specifically Shore Drive Trail information, to the residents. Resident Wes Southworth stated that he supported Mr. Ellison's quest to expand disc golf facilities to the northern part of the county and volunteered to help as needed. Watkins asked if Ellison and Southwood had been in touch with Bill Bowen and they answered that they had and that's why they were at the meeting.

RAB Member Reports

Van Rysdam stated that it was the job of the department to keep the public informed. He agreed that additional disc golf courses are needed. He thanked staff for the strategic dashboard. He reviewed the statistics for the golf course and asked for future plans based on the increase in participation resulting in limitations to scheduling time on the course. Kane provided an update on the newly remodeled golf course operations. He asked what affect the non-approval of the county comprehensive plan had on Parks & Rec. He provided his opinion on the importance of staff developing internal Key Performance Indicators. Baccari answered that the department was tracking the KPIs within the framework of the Strategic Plan and said she would be providing a presentation demonstrating what was being tracked and how the data was being used. Van Rysdam offered additional comments about how information is shared and the process.

Trent asked for clarification on recreation programming sponsorships with the Park Foundation. Ross, Park Foundation Director, provided details on the Foundation seeks sponsors for a variety of events and programs as well as support for capital projects. Trent offered his support in expanding disc golf using less expensive options. He

asked for clarification on the County golf fees and revenues. Watkins said that this would be covered in the Strategic Dashboard presentation. He asked how the school district handled gaps in coverage with Athletic Trainers. Van Rysdam replied that the district outsources during gap periods. He mentioned that Jax Beach Golf Course charges higher rates, and said the course is immaculately maintained. He said the county should focus on this.

Long noticed that the quality of services provided by Parks and Recreation has noticeably improved.

Watkins referred to public comments about bulk mail. She explained that the RAB did not provide materials or advertisements and that it was an appointed volunteer advisory board that served at the pleasure of the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). Long stated that meetings were advertised, but events and programs were shared through social media and the county web site. Kane reviewed the procedures for projects, public involvement and BCC review. Watkins asked how residents of St. Augustine South could get information about the Trail Committee that was formed how would that information get trickled down. Kane explained that Commissioner Murphy received approval from the BCC to work with a citizens group to redesign the trail. Murphy has been working with two individuals. The Parks and Public Works departments have provided information to the committee. The redesigned trail suggestions will be presented to the BCC for consideration. Conversation relating to sharing community and public information and public relations continued. Watkins offered Commissioner Joseph well wishes as she recovers from a personal illness. She congratulated the Park Foundation on their recognition as an Emerging Star at the National Association of Parks Foundation annual conference. The Foundation was recognized for their pathways in making it easier for sponsorships and giving and for capital initiatives like The Field of Dreams turf. Watkins stated that she sent a letter of recommendation on behalf of the RAB to the BCC to support the Bailey Ranch grant application for the ADA kayak launch. She asked the RAB members to send questions and recommendations for fees to Diane for discussion at a future meeting.

Project Update

Tim Connor, Project Manager for Parks & Recreation introduced himself and provided an overview of the Shore Drive Trail project direction from the BCC to redesign the trail, specifically, the alignment (move closer to the road without bifurcating the green space or impeding drainage swales), width (from 8' to 5') and surface material (use a more pervious surface within the parameters of the project budget). The department has received a revised set of plans that are being reviewed by staff and Public Works and hope to have a finalized set of revised plans by the end of the month. He said that the foundational work has been completed. Next steps will be to engage the citizen advisory group and determine how to get the information out to the community. Bids will be solicited for a construction contract. The winning bid will be presented to the BCC for consideration. Once accepted the project will take up to 18 months. Discussion related to the Trail ensued. Watkins offered public comments to those waiting. CareyAnne Beachem expressed concerns about the project. Connor clarified the SCOPE, process and intention involved in the trail project. Kane explained that the final decision will be made by the BCC. He said that methods of communication to the residents will be considered, and the department will make every effort to keep the residents informed.

Connor highlighted each of the 25 Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Projects. He explained that the projects were included in the Parks tab of the St. Johns County Capital Improvement Plan Dashboard provided by Public Works: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/899b4250a51b481f99f01a5e32f52588>. Trent asked for an update on DeLeon Shores Park Improvements. Connor said pickleball courts will be added, revamp the skate park, walking trail, playground and clean up the green space and general improvements along the roadway. Van Rysdam asked if there was a plan to improve the Vilano Beach Boat Ramp. Baccari said that the property was being fully utilized. He asked about sand volleyball courts being built in the northwest part of the county. Kane answered that there are two courts included in the Northwest Park Site. Connor said the park will be opened sometime in 2027.

He asked staff to include the percentage of completion, prioritization of the projects and funding. Connor answered that the dashboard includes this information. He explained that priorities are re-evaluated as needed.

Strategic Dashboard

Miska reviewed the Strategic Dashboard. Trent asked for the ratio of beach passes sold at the Tax Collector's Office. Baccari said we didn't have those numbers but could get them. He asked about the Sports Marketing allocation. Baccari replied that everyone who applied was given a grant, and the money not allocated during the year is used for park maintenance. A brief discussion followed. Van Rysdam gave props to Miska for a job well done. He asked Kane about the dip in pier admissions. Kane explained that closures for repairs and lack of water affected attendance. Long complimented the new beach access system.

FY26 Budget

Kane reviewed the fiscal year budget requests for the last three years. He said that the budget has remained steady. Van Rysdam offered his support to the department for operating so well with so few employees. Conversation relating to the budget followed.

Staff Reports

Kane reminded everyone about the Ribbon Cutting Saturday at Solomon Calhoun Community Center. He mentioned that the new software being used to collect tolls at the beaches collects data that includes how many cars are visiting the beach daily and the number of annual beach passes sold.

Baccari said that the Parks and Recreation Department continues to work on the initiatives assigned for inclusion in the countywide strategic plan. She said that the data for the initiatives will be entered quarterly. How the data will be collected and shared is still being determined. She said that the long-term vision is that the initiatives will be included in the quarterly updates and posted on the county website. The group discussed the process and expectations for the data inputted into the countywide strategic plan and how this translates into Key Performance Indicators.

There was a motion by Long and a second by Trent to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried 4/0.