

Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – January 14, 2025

Call to Order

Members Present: Lauren Watkins, George Vancore, Jason Trent, Whitney Graves, Bill Bowen, Harold Dockins, Brad Long

Members Absent: None

Recreation Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; Robert McFarland, Sports Tourism Specialist; Lauren Trice, Administrative Coordinator/Liaison

Also Present: David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District; Christian Whitehurst, County Commissioner; Marithza Ross, St. Johns County Parks Foundation

Approval of the Minutes: Watkins called for approval of November 2025 meeting minutes and received a motion from Vancore who was seconded by Long. Motion passed 7/0.

Public Comment: The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items. Bruce Milliken spoke regarding Shore Drive Trail and access to information about the proposed project. He is against the project and hoped for mailers and more info pushed to the public. Carrie Ann Verdan also spoke against the trail and mentioned concerns of increased traffic. Chris Ranung spoke against the trail, stating environmental concerns and use of tax payer money. Susan Miller spoke and said that she is tired of this project. She would like to take the funds from this project and put it towards the new boat ramp to honor Paul Waldron. Margo Geer spoke in favor of the Shore Drive trail. Last, David Harken spoke against the Shore Drive Trail project.

Margo Geer spoke in favor of the trail due to safety concerns.

Following public comment, Lauren Watkins asked Ryan Kane to provide an update on the Shore Drive Trail. There is a community survey and meeting scheduled for February 11th. Discussion ensued.

Reports:

Commissioner Whitehurst stated that he is happy to be back as County Commission Liaison.

David Simpkins provided updates about high school athletic championships. He spoke about where high school swim teams are practicing, since the high schools do not have their own pools. He also spoke about the partnership between the school district and the St. Johns Middle School Athletic Association.

Lauren Watkins spoke and welcomed new RAB member Whitney Graves. She shared that Diane Gorski is retiring and that Lauren Trice will be the new staff liaison.

Marithza Ross provided an overview of the Parks Foundation and its mission. She shared the success of the Family Color Run held at the SJC Fairgrounds in November. Color Run attendance was doubled from 2024 to 2025. She said the next big program will be the Kids Triathlon in the Spring. The Foundation has received a platinum status.

Board member reports:

George Van Core spoke about Field of Dreams and the upcoming ribbon cutting. He shared details of the improvements within the park and that the opening day is January 31st. He said that the foundation will be receiving a \$20,000 check from money they have raised. Signups have reached 250 kids as of today and that is an increase for participation from last year. Van Core brought up the partnership agreement and would like to make changes to the agreement to improve access for more youth. Discussion ensued.

Harold Dockins spoke about his power walking program at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center.

Bill Bowen said that disc golf participated in the color run. Bowen said that he had never heard of it, but he was in attendance and provided positive feedback on the event. He requested to get an update on the Sykes Property from Ryan when he did the staff report.

Jason Trent praised the way Parks and Recreation utilizes social media to get out information to the community. He went to North Beach Park and said it is awesome and wanted to give the department credit for the improvements.

Whitney Graves had the opportunity to sit down with Ryan Kane to get an overview of the board. She also shared that there is a new JiuJitsu gym that just opened and is offering free classes to teens right now.

Easter Sunrise Service Applications

Parks and Rec received three beach permit applications for these events. The applicants are all previous applicants. Staff and the board members had a brief discussion. Bowen made a motion to approve all three applications, second by Vancore. Motion passed 7/0.

TDT Category III Grant Allocation Review Panel Recommendations (McFarland)

There was a discussion about the TDT Category 3 grant applications. Bobby McFarland has created a scoring system for the grant applications. Lauren Watkins provided an overview of the process and what is asked of the applicants. Fourteen grants total were received. McFarland presented background information about the applicants and information about the grant applications received. There was a motion and a second to approve the grant amounts. Staff and the board then discussed the amounts of the applications, as well as the scoring. Discussion began of having a minimum and maximum amount for the grant, to better support smaller local events. Motion by Trent for \$1,000 minimum, seconded by Graves motion passed 7/0.

Staff Reports:

Ryan Kane talked about the newly reopened North Beach Park and the addition of a heart chain link fence for locks, so that they do not end up on the pedestrian walkover. There was a ribbon cutting on January 9th. He mentioned the Field of Dreams project and encouraged others to attend on January 31st. Kane provided an update on the Sykes property, it is 35 acres adjacent to the fairgrounds. He also provided other project updates, as well as the San Sebastian Park. Whitney Graves questioned access to the property. Kane said that it will be gated, and initially public access will be limited. Improvements at

De Leon Shores Park will begin soon. There was a partnership meeting in December. Lastly, Ryan shared that Diane Gorski is retiring and that no plans had yet been made.

Jamie Baccari provided programming updates, including the upcoming MLK breakfast this weekend, movies in the park, basketball, kite day, summer camp registration. Lauren Watkins inquired about the programming survey. There was a partnership meeting in December, and all partners have signed the partnership agreement. She said that staff are revamping the youth association agreement. There was discussion about changes being made and how to verify numbers of participants and ensure it serves mostly St. Johns County residents. Vancore would like to see some more changes to the agreement and Watkins suggested making it an agenda item for future meetings.

Motion to adjourn.