

## Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – April 8, 2026

### Call to Order

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

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

**Approval of the Minutes:** Watkins called for approval of the March 11, 2026 meeting minutes and received a motion from Dockins, seconded by Vancore. Motion passes 7/0.

**Public Comment:** The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items. There were none.

### Reports

**Comm. Whitehurst** did not have any reports this month.

**David Simpkins** said that winter sports have concluded. Bartram Trail HS won a cheer championship. Boys' soccer at Beachside won the 5A State Championship. In girls wrestling, there were three state champions from Pedro Menendez, St. Augustine High, and Creekside High. All winners will be recognized at the next school board meeting. Simpkins will be retiring on June 1<sup>st</sup>. He will be at the May meeting.

**Chair Report** – Watkins does not have a report and shared that Carrie Miska will present the annual report dashboard in May.

### Member Reports

**Whitney Graves** shared that the Character Cup event at Toco Creek High School was a beautiful display of the children in sports. Southwoods won the Tug of War at the event. She has heard a lot about summer camp and thanked staff for providing this childcare option for her employees.

**Jason Trent** mentioned the recent Spring Break and The Players Championship, which were very good for the economy in the Ponte Vedra area. The Players Championship had a very large crowd. He thinks there is a move from Jacksonville Beach to the Ponte Vedra area for a lot of different reasons and spoke positively of the impact of these events.

**Bill Bowen** shared disc golf course updates around St. Johns County. He visited all four courses in the County this month and showed a map to the board. He mentioned improvements that Parks and Recreation have made at the Moccasin Creek Fairgrounds disc golf course, including solar panels and tee pads. He would like to get another course in the north end of the county.

**Hal Dockins** shared that he was recently at the Streetlight Program at the Solomon Calhoun Center where kids can come on Friday nights to play basketball and hang out. He would like to know if it can be added to the Parks and recreation newsletter. He said April, June, and July dates are coming up. Kane

said that they will evaluate if that is possible, as the priority of the newsletter is to promote parks and recreation programs, however moving forward third party uses can be included if there is space.

**Brad Long** said he would normally report on the Foundation, but their meeting is next week and invited Marithza Ross to speak.

**Marithza Ross** shared that the Parks Foundation has been very busy. The Foundation is working to deliver a completed and fully funded turf field at Field of Dreams. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Foundation formally submitted a request to the Board of County Commissioners for execution. At this time, it is not on the agenda. It is an asset valued at \$115,604 which comes at no cost to the county.

Ross also shared that the Kids Triathlon registrations are taking off. Lastly, she shared that there is a “Dine to Donate” fundraiser at Texas Roadhouse on Monday and 10% of orders will benefit the Foundation when you show the fundraiser flyer.

**George Vancore** said that EV bikes are becoming extremely problematic. He said there have been several incidents in our local parks resulting in park damage. The sheriff’s office has been called during these occurrences, and they advised them to keep calling. He stated the bikes are sending kids to the hospital because of collisions and kids running into each other. He would like to see legal action. He also shared that there is a serious shortage of sports referees. 50% of new referees do not come back for a second year. Field of Dreams is on the downside of the season and it ends in May. He said the parking lots, concession stand, and toilets are great. He thanked the County and the Commissioners.

#### **TDC Grant Updates, Robert McFarland**

**McFarland** met County staff to make updates to the TDC Grant Policy. He shared that 10 changes have been made. Trent asked how often the TDC board requests changes. McFarland shared that it has increased in the last year. Kane asked through the chair to clarify the question. Dockins asked how the TDC board members are chosen and Watkins said they are appointed. Watkins shared that in the May or June meeting they will appoint someone from the RAB board to the TDC board. She said if anyone is interested to please let Lauren Trice know.

#### **Vandalism Campaign Update, Ryan Kane**

**Kane** said that Parks and Recreation started a campaign called “Enjoy, Don’t Destroy”. The goal was to bring awareness to the local users and decrease vandalism. The campaign has been successful and vandalism costs have come down. He stated the campaign has been shared on social media and parks are getting security cameras. Watkins asked if she could get the number of work orders before the campaign from staff. Vancore inquired about athletic associations funding security camera equipment. Kane stated that our camera footage is not monitored by staff, and the footage is reviewed by the sheriff’s office. Dockins inquired how the work orders came in, and Kane stated that we do not have that information. The work orders come from a variety of sources including staff findings, park users, phone calls, and Cityworks.

#### **Serenata Beach Club Potential Beach Access**

Kane presented on this topic. This was presented as a board agenda item in March. It would be two additional parcels. He gave the RAB board members a map showing the site. He will let the RAB know when it comes back to the BOCC. Dockins asked how many residential sites were on the property. There

would just be one residential site. The current owner would like to keep one and the other site would be for public access. Trent asked if there was a date set and Whitehurst said it should come back sometime in May, no later than the second meeting in May. Graves asked if there are a lot of negative responses from the community about this. Whitehurst said that most support this. There is a very small minority that oppose this. Trent asked about the history with the land developer and Whitehurst provided that information.

## **Staff Reports**

### **Ryan Kane**

Kane stated that it is budget season. On Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> Parks and Recreation staff will present the proposed budget to the County Administrator. He would like to present this to the RAB board the following day at the May meeting if the board desires. The partnership agreement policy is going to go to the board, formalizing the agreements the department currently utilizes. Lastly, Kane shared there will be a groundbreaking ceremony for the last of the four new parks on May 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Davis Park closures & impacts**

- The park will get four baseball diamonds, a new parking lot, and one of the football fields will be converted to turf. The department is working with the school system to utilize school fields at Nease High School, Beachside High School, and Ponte Vedra High School.

Dockins inquired about park updates. Kane said it is up to the RAB how often they would like staff to provide updates on park projects.

**Jamie Baccari** shared with the board that 1,644 kids entered the summer camp lottery, which equates to about 1,100 families. Of those 1,644 kids, 329 were accepted and 400 were waitlisted. About 1,300 kids were denied, which is about 900 families. She stated that with the new parks opening, Shearwater will be able to accommodate 125 summer campers and the department will add two other small camps with about 80 kids at each. Dockins inquired about the limit, and Baccari answered that we must have the ability to have the kids inside out of the weather during camp.

Next, Baccari spoke about upcoming events. The movie Jaws will be shown at the pier. Also upcoming is a Day of Thanks group cleanup at Cora Harrison, Dinner & a Movie, Night Under the Stars, Parents Night Out, and a waterway cleanup.

**Vancore** asked what is limiting summer camp attendance. Baccari answered that it is due to how many community centers we have available.

**Graves** asked if the new anticipated camp spots will be open by next summer. Baccari said that Shearwater will be open next summer and the other two will be open the following summer.

**George Vancore** made a motion to adjourn, seconded by **Whitney Graves**.

Meeting adjourned 7/0