

Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – May 13, 2026

Call to Order

Members Present: Brad Long, Bill Bowen, Jason Trent, George Vancore, Whitney Graves

Members Absent: Lauren Watkins, Hal Dockins

Recreation Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director; Carrie Miska, Business Manager; 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: Long called for approval of the April 8, 2026 meeting minutes and received a motion from Bill seconded by Vancore. Motion passes 5/0.

Public Comment: The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items.

1. **John Ellson of 296 N Lake Cunningham Ave** spoke about getting a disc golf course in the northwest end of the county. He has helped put in a course at a local church and would like to see more options at that end of the county.

Following public comments, there was a collaborative discussion between the board and John about the benefits and popularity of disc golf, as well as what it takes to set up a new course.

Reports

Comm. Whitehurst asked McFarland if we have ever done an assessment of land in the County. He asked if we could do a formal assessment of Trout Creek. He praised staff for the groundbreaking at Nocatee Park and said this is another step forward in building the four regional parks. He is looking forward to kids playing on the fields at the new parks.

David Simpkins reported a very active Spring sport season. He reported which teams lost in the state and regional playoffs. PV Boys Lacrosse and Girls Lacrosse won the state title. Creekside Girls track team won the state title. Vancore asked if this was his last meeting and Simpkins said yes. He thanked him for his support and praised his career. Ryan gave kudos to Simpkins for helping find field space for Ponte Vedra girls softball.

Member Reports

George Vancore shared that all spring sports are winding down. Thanks to the County Commissioners for the bathroom at Field of Dreams, it was a fabulous year. They accepted donations this year than they had in the last 10 years. 210 kids. Other than that, it is quiet, besides the EV bikes. He said they continue to call the police. Kids use Aberdeen and Plantation Park fields as dirt tracks when the fields are wet.

Bill Bowen went to Beluthahatchee last Sunday for a folk concert and said that it was beautiful. Bowen updated Ryan Kane on the disc golf discussion that occurred during public comment. Bill Bowen believes Gourd Island may be a good location.

Jason Trent was able to make it to the state track meets at UNF. He saw the teams from St. Johns County. He praised the Just Tri It event and the work staff did. He inquired about disc golf course and

the numbers. Kane said that the board could request a feasibility study from County staff to see where disc golf courses could potentially go. Kane said staff could then come back to the board and present this information. He also mentioned the new property Parks and Recreation acquired on 207. Discussion ensued.

Trent made a motion to ask staff to look at solutions for additional disc golf locations around the County, second by **Graves**. Motion passes 5/0

Whitney Graves shared that she spoke with Paul Dozier with the Kingfish Shootout. He has over 400 junior anglers who signed up for his events and she was very impressed. She asked if we have ever done a passport type event for people who visit parks. Kane confirmed that yes, we have done that in the past.

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 a video recap from the 2026 Kids Triathlon, as well as a graphic of the demographics who registered for this year's event. Attendance was doubled from the previous year. This year the Foundation brought in 13 total partners, up from 3 last year and raised about \$10,000.

Ross next shared the status of a donation of an artificial turf replacement at the Field of Dreams that the Foundation presented to the County, that was not able to advance to a Board of County Commissioners meeting due to procurement policies. The County requested that the Foundation request a refund, and then the funds will be passed to the County so that the project can go through the procurement and bid process. She stated that this update is just for the record, and it was still a success. George Vancore asked for clarification and Ross said they were denied the opportunity to present the project to the Board of County Commissioners. Vancore expressed his disappointment with this news and asked Ryan Kane to explain further. Kane stated that the Parks Foundation is still relatively new, with Canright House being its first completed project. From the County's perspective, the turf field is a County asset so it will be completed through a different procurement process.

Vancore asked when the project was expected to be completed. Kane explained that the County plans to utilize Sourcewell, a government procurement cooperative, for the project. He noted that Ross had already utilized Sourcewell and that the field should be ready for the spring season. Vancore asked whether this meant the new field would be completed by January 2027, and Kane confirmed that this is the goal. Vancore asked who was responsible for moving the project forward, and Kane explained that the procurement process was the responsibility of the Purchasing department.

Long joined the discussion and noted that the project had been discussed during the May Foundation meeting. Vancore expressed his frustration with the status of the project and stated that the update was unexpected. Long acknowledged Vancore's concerns and thanked him for his comments and continued support. Vancore stated that he wanted his displeasure with the status of the project reflected in the record. Additional discussion followed regarding the project timeline. Graves asked whether the transition to Workday had contributed to the delay. Kane and Ross confirmed that Workday was not a factor in the delay.

Long and Vancore thanked Marithza for the update. A copy of the letter she read regarding the donation was provided to be posted with the approved meeting minutes.

RAB Updates and Elections, Lauren Trice

Lauren Trice provided an update regarding attendance rules for RAB members, upcoming elections for chair and vice-chair, as well as selecting a board member to help rank TDC grant applications at the next RAB meeting.

FY26 Strategic Dashboard Update, Carrie Miska

Carrie Miska presented an update on the Fiscal Year 2026 Strategic Dashboard and explained the data shown to the board.

Partner Request Application, Ryan Kane

The new partner application was shown as a reference. Kane shared that an applicant would be at the June meeting. Questions were gathered from the board to send to the applicant, so that they could have answers prepared for the June meeting.

Approval of Special Events

1. Old School Kingfish Shootout, Vilano Pier, June 13th
2. Game on Triathlon, Vilano Beach July 26th and October 11th
3. Annual Bronco Group Christmas in July Fundraiser, July 11th

Trent made a motion to approve all three events, seconded by **Vancore**. Motion passes 5/0

FY27 Budget Presentation, Ryan Kane

Ryan shared the budget presentation PowerPoint that was presented to administration on May 12th. Trent asked about service packages for new lights and what the cost savings would be. Kane said there is an assumed cost savings on utilities. He also shared a printout spreadsheet showing the budget breakdown year over year. Whitehurst asked if Ryan had done a rollback version of the budget and Kane answered no. Vancore asked if the County would go for sponsors and Kane said that is the intent of the Park Foundation.

Staff Reports

Ryan Kane shared that the groundbreaking of the Ponte Vedra Nocatee Regional Park was a success. He said concrete is going up at Greenbriar. The Sportsplex and Shearwater are nearing completion; he thinks they may open in December. He said as soon as the park is handed over to the county, people will be able to use it. They will try to let the grass fields sit.

Lauren Trice provided the staff report in Jamie Baccari's absence. Upcoming department programs and events include summer camp, adult volleyball, archery camp, beach walks, fish camp, geocaching, nature book club, youth & adult archery club, a paddleboarding trip, and the last cast which is a fishing program.

Whitney Graves made a motion to adjourn, seconded by **Bill Bowen**.

Meeting adjourned 5/0



ST. JOHNS COUNTY PARKS FOUNDATION

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Date: May 13, 2026

To: St. Johns County Recreation Advisory Board

From: Marithza Ross, Executive Director

St. Johns County Parks Foundation

Subject: Field of Dreams Turf Replacement Project Update

The all-abilities turf replacement project at Aberdeen Park was prevented from advancing to the Board of County Commissioners based upon County Administration's preferred operational and procurement approach.

Under the Foundation's current leadership, the proposed turnkey charitable gift donation for the Field of Dreams turf replacement project was described by County staff as not meeting the "standard practice for County-led project delivery on County-owned property."

Since February 2, 2026, the Foundation repeatedly requested written clarification identifying the specific policy, procurement requirement, administrative standard, safety concern, liability issue, ordinance, code provision, or applicable law that the project did not meet. Upon one final written request on May 11, 2026, the County requested the Foundation seek a refund and declined to provide formal written confirmation identifying any specific law, ordinance, code requirement, procurement standard, or formally adopted County policy prohibiting the project from advancing to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration and final vote.

This project reflected strong community support and addressed a visible need within the all-abilities community that was not included in the park's original \$1.5 million renovation investment.

The originally proposed Spring 2026 project start date no longer has a confirmed installation timeline, as the Foundation requested a full refund of the \$115,604 charitable contribution from

AstroTurf. Upon receipt of the refund, the Foundation will proceed with passing the donor funds through to the County for the County's procurement and bid process.

The Foundation stands by its donor intent obligation that the project was successfully funded and prepared for delivery as originally presented; however, the project was ultimately prevented from advancing to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration and vote.

We especially want to thank the Foundation's donors, volunteer Board members, community advocates, and families who supported this effort and worked collaboratively throughout the process to help improve recreational opportunities for the all-abilities community.

While the Foundation has agreed to comply with the County's preferred process moving forward, any additional costs, delays, scope changes, or expenses associated with the County's procurement and delivery process will no longer be the responsibility of the Foundation or its donors.

Submitted for Board record and public update,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marithza C. Ross". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marithza" being more prominent than the last name "Ross".

Marithza Ross
Executive Director
St. Johns County Parks Foundation