

Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – June 10, 2026

Call to Order

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

Members Absent: Brad Long

Recreation Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; Robert McFarland, Sports Tourism Specialist; Joanne Spencer, Project Specialist; Ernie Edwards, Facility Coordinator; Lauren Trice, Administrative Coordinator/Liaison

Also Present: Christian Whitehurst, County Commissioner; Tony Taylor, Florida Legends Football Club, Inc.

Approval of the Minutes: The chair called for approval of the May 13, 2026, meeting minutes. Vancore requested that the meeting minutes be amended to include his commentary regarding the Field of Dreams turf project.

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

Reports

Comm. Whitehurst had no report.

Lauren Trice reported in absence of Guy Harris. Guy Harris and Darrell Sutherland will be the new contacts for SJCSA Athletics.

Watkins began the meeting with elections of a new chair and vice chair and handed the meeting to Ryan Kane.

Kane added that the chair champions the annual report. Trent asked if the current chair and vice chair can be elected again. Kane clarified that the vice chair typically manages public comment.

Kane then addressed the board regarding elections. He asked for a call for nominations for chair. Bill Bowen nominated Lauren Watkins. Vancore seconded. Watkins confirmed that she was willing to remain chair, and the board voted. Lauren Watkins was re-elected as chair, 6/0. Vancore nominated Brad Long for vice chair, Whitney Graves seconded. Brad Long was re-elected as vice chair, 6/0.

Watkins said that next the board would elect someone to represent them for TDC grant evaluations. Bobby McFarland explained the responsibilities of the role and how long they would serve. Kane asked for clarification of the time commitment to review grants. McFarland estimated that this would take about a full day. Vancore asked for clarification of what these grants are for. Watkins explained that the goal is to bring outside tourism. Hal Dockins expressed his interest, and Watkins chose him to represent.

Member Reports

Whitney Graves spoke to advocate for voters to research upcoming elections and the effects that the results of those elections would have on the County. She mentioned that this vote could potentially create a lot of changes and again asked individuals to research and speak with their commissioners. Watkins asked Graves if she wanted to clarify which policy and Graves said this was regarding the tax

referendum. She spoke about the benefits of Parks and Recreation and how there would need to be additional revenue streams if this tax referendum passes.

Jason Trent had no report.

Bill Bowen stated that he would like to follow up on Whitney's report. He said it seems like the County is being proactive and asked for an update from staff regarding County reactions to the proposed tax referendum. Kane shared that the County currently receives \$400 million dollars from property taxes for general fund dollars that support all County departments and Supervisor of Elections. Kane said it will roll out over a few years. Whitehurst shared bill would ultimately result in a loss of \$113 million dollars for the County government. He said that things would operate differently should this pass, there are a lot of possibilities from fees to reduction in services. Kane said there are a lot of discussions happening regarding potential changes and also mentioned that this may not pass in November. Watkins asked if there is an example of a project that is currently on hold, and Baccari shared that there is a disc golf project on hold. Graves also said that she wanted to state on the record to point out the value of the work that the Foundation can do to support the department. Vancore asked if staff has taken a look at alternative funding sources. Baccari answered that these are all things we are looking at and we do have a handful of ways to raise dollars, but options are limited. She provided the example of grants that require matching dollars. She said the Foundation is a key component to solutions. She said we have been fortunate to not have had that kind of pressure on the department due to a supportive Board of County Commissioners. She said that several capital improvement projects come out of the general fund. Vancore asked if this would affect the four regional parks, and Kane explained that we have had discussions about everything. He said two of these parks are 85% of the way complete, so those will not be frozen. Kane added that all capital improvement projects are being evaluated. He also gave examples of renovating existing parks versus building new parks being factors in decisions.

Hal Dockins is excited to offer an 8-week strength class, in addition to his power walk clinic. The classes will be 45 minutes each. These are offered at no cost. This is open to the public starting in August.

George Vancore asked to give a shout out to the St. Augustine Police Department and St. Johns County Sheriff's office for putting a stop to the teen takeovers. He said we still have the issue with electronic vehicles and bikes in the parks and it is very unfortunate. They continue to call the non-emergency number. Some community suggestions have surfaced that he will take offline with the County later. He talked to some school resource officers who all agreed that it is a problem that is getting worse, and the fields are taking a beating from the electric vehicles.

Approval of Special Events

1. First Coast Volleyball Series, November 13-15, 2026

Ryan Kane said this would be a beach event, just south of the pier. Watkins asked if this is outside of sea turtle season, and Kane said that it is. Watkins asked if there were any questions and that this has already been vetted by County staff. Vancore asked if there is any consideration given to these applications to ask if they do anything for special needs kids. Baccari said we would not make that ask because these are private events not hosted or funded by the department. Dockins asked about public notification of these events and Baccari answered that when we have events like this, we would coordinate communication to the public through the public affairs team. Vancore made a motion to approve, seconded by Dockins. Motion passes, 6/0.

Florida Legends Football Club Inc. Partner Organization Application

Tony Taylor presented his partnership request to the board. He shared his credentials and experience and gave an overview of his organization. The club has grown in recent years. He reviewed the club offerings and shared information about the Tony Taylor Soccer Academy. The club employs paid coaching with professional playing backgrounds and international experience. He showed the program and registration fees and said that they offer payment plans to families. The fees support professional coaching, league participation, field rentals, insurance, etc. He then featured some of the individual player accomplishments in his league and around the country. His club uses Plantation Park, Mill Creek Park, and Fort Family Regional Park in Jacksonville.

The chair then called for public comment on this agenda item.

1. **Collin Golish, Fleming Island** is on the U14 boys team. He said Coach Tony has helped him grow as a player and person, developing skills on the field. He has had a huge impact on him. When he was injured, Coach Tony helped him find a physical therapist and held his spot for him on the team. The club recently visited the Ronald McDonald House to give back to the community. He is incredibly grateful for his coach and the club.
2. **Mia Lee Chong, 169 Auburndale Dr, Ponte Vedra**, has been with coach Tony for five years, after leaving another association where she felt unvalued as a player. She said he helps develop them as players both on and off the field. She said he treats everyone as family and provides scholarship opportunities for the less fortunate.
3. **Alejandro Taylor, 9131 Foster Court, Jacksonville** spoke as a parent of Tony Taylor. He stated that Tony is more than qualified. He said that his son has an incredible work ethic. He is honorable and has integrity. He shared that when he first went to Portugal his son told him he loved the game but that there had to be something more he could do. He stated that Tony could have gone on another path, but he wanted to help the youth.
4. **Janice Golish, Fleming Island, FL** stated that Tony has made a big impact on her son's life. She said many players have been injured and have struggled, and Tony has helped them all. He helps them find the right people. She has worked as an admin for the club for the past two years and has seen how many kids have been turned away. They need the field so kids do not have to be turned away. It is a great opportunity. Dedicated field space is necessary, and lack of this restricts the number of players.

The Chair then opened the floor for discussion. Baccari asked to first go over the process and requirements since this is the first time this board has heard this kind of request. She said there is certain criteria applicants must make, and this application has already been vetted by County staff. She said that this does not take away any existing field space the organization currently has, it would just mean if they were not an approved partner, they do not get priority for available fields. Watkins asked about field space, and if this means other partners could lose field space if approved. Baccari confirmed that it would.

George Vancore gave accolades to Taylor for coming out and for his website. He said the testimonials speak for themselves. He asked if Tony had made this request from Duval County and Clay County, seeing that about half of his players are from outside St. Johns County. Taylor said that they have, but

they have not heard back from Duval. Vancore asked if they get involved with TOPS, an international organization for children with special needs who play soccer. Taylor said when he was a professional player he did some work with Special Olympics. He has not heard of TOPS. Vancore then asked County staff if this would take field space from one organization to another, shifting the burden. Kane answered that ultimately it is the Recreation Advisory Board's decision to add a partner, and a new partner would become a priority level. He said they currently do that based on the number of players and fields. Kane said decisions to take field space away are based on player participation numbers going down.

Hal Dockins said he enjoyed the presentation. He said they want to give back and support, he understands the limitations. He asked for clarification on scholarships and what they include. Taylor said it depends on the family. They have a request form, and they try to work with them. Dockins asked if the school district may have opportunities for field space.

Bill Bowen asked if they have any recreational players and Taylor said that they do. Jason Trent asked if there is a limitation on partnerships and Baccari said that right now there is not. Watkins asked if there is an annual routine. Jamie said there is an annual partner agreement at the end of the year.

Trent asked how many scholarships were given last year and if the club is supportive of players playing in school sports. Taylor said they are open to it. Trent asked if there was a hard rule about school participation for the higher-level players. Tony said he respects the school program.

Graves said it was a beautiful presentation. Graves asked for clarification if this would give them extra field space or if it would just decrease the amount they pay. Baccari said that organizations will grow in who they serve and what they offer. Currently there is no process to manage growth of organizations. Kane said previously

Taylor said the 143 is who they could accept based on current field space.

Watkins asked if St. Johns County students would be prioritized if they were given more field space. Baccari said that there is currently a percentage of players required to be from St. Johns County. Watkins asked how the timing works while notifying who gets space when. Kane said that this is already in progress.

Five minute recess.

The meeting resumed at 3:08PM and discussion regarding the partnership request continued. Watkins asked if he feels confident that he would be able to meet the required conditions set by the department for partners. Watkins also asked if his non-profit home office is in St. Johns County. Taylor said yes, it is in Ponte Vedra. Watkins asked Kane what the relationship between this situation and the potential tax referendum. Baccari said if that passes, it will entirely change the way Parks and Recreation does business. Kane said we must wait and see what happens in November and that there is a lot of conversation about fees changing drastically.

Bill Bowen stated he loves the passion of this group. He asked about the other soccer groups and pointed out their numbers, saying they are huge.

Vancore said he would love to have them as a partner but raised concerns about capacity and about making this decision today without knowing the outcome of the November vote. Baccari said that today our capacity is full and non-partner requests are being denied more often, and staff are spot checking

field usage. She said there is limited to no space out there. When new parks open, that changes things, however that is after the November vote. She said there are a lot of unknowns. Watkins asked if a motion could be made to approve the group as a partner when the new parks open. Kane stated there are many variables. Baccari said they can also make the recommendation to wait until December to re-evaluate the request after the November vote. Watkins asked if this would result in a flood of partner requests and Baccari answered that the department already has many requests. The department has criteria in place that disqualifies many of these requests, which is why the board has not seen one in a long time.

Trent stated that he has seen Tony's program at Fort Family Regional Park, and he can vouch for his demand on the club. He said as someone growing up playing soccer in the area, the current partners are in it to make money and brought up the question of wanting this region to be as competitive as possible or accessible as possible. He would like more diversity in the options offered. Graves said logistically it comes down to the fact that we do not have space available. Baccari said based on numbers, Tony Taylor would be allocated one field in addition to his current requests. Watkins clarified what a vote to approve this application would mean should it pass. She then asked if there was a motion.

Bowen made a motion to approve them as a partner, Dockins seconded. Conversation continued. Trent said he would vote for it and asked for partners to have to come back in the future to reevaluate and ensure partners still meet the needs of the County. Baccari said we can put on the agenda to reevaluate the partner agreement. Vancore said in good conscience he cannot vote on it. He said he would like to make the motion to approve them as a partner contingent on what field capacity is in January. Dockins said to let the staff worry about the budget.

Graves added that they are required to consider the budget, and it is a disservice to the community to not take the budget into account. Bowen stated that they do already have some field space. Dockins made a motion to approve, seconded by Trent. The motion passed 4/2, with Graves and Vancore opposed.

Staff Reports

Ryan Kane shared that there is a hiring freeze in the county and non-fund encumbered projects are currently on hold. The new proposed legislation will be on the ballot in November.

Jamie Baccari shared that July is Parks and Recreation month, the events are on the website from our popsicles in the park to kayaking trips. She shared that the school district did announce high school facilities open for summer usage, on Wednesdays from 5-7pm. The public may use the track, tennis courts, and basketball courts with the following restrictions: No organized practice, training, or field usage.

Watkins made a motion to adjourn, seconded by **Graves**. Meeting adjourned 6/0.