



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Parks & Recreation Department

RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

Attendance

RAB Members present: Casey Van Rysdam, Brad Long, Lauren Watkins, Marty McEachean, Deb Chapin, Bill Bowen, and Harold Dockins

Also present: District 3 Commissioner Paul Waldron; Ashanti Austin, Assistant to Deputy County Administrator Sarah Taylor; Parks & Recreation staff: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; Teddy Meyer, Recreation Facilities Manager; Sydney Lindblad, Natural Resources Program Manager; Diane Gorski, Project Specialist

Approval of the Minutes

Chair stated that the May minutes needed to have the date corrected. Long motioned to approve the minutes with the correction, seconded by Chapin. Approved 5/0.

Public Comments

Chair called for Public Comments. Andor Gyulai, 29 Vista Lake, provided his international background in beach volleyball and his desire for the county to create additional beach volleyball courts to help expand his programs and offer opportunities to all to learn the skills needed to play beach volleyball. Discussion regarding the need and process to evaluate best fit for adding new sports activities and fields and courts to our athletic facilities ensued. Kane mentioned that the High Schools are now offering Beach Volleyball and that the County Parks and Recreation Department will be indirectly affected by the new athletic activity as the players and parents will want county facilities to practice on outside of school programming. Waldron asked staff to get current day cost estimates to build volleyball courts and Kane promised that staff would look into it.

Reports

Current status of the Bert Watson memorial was given by the Chair. Baccari stated that the project was moving forward.

Ashanti Austin, Assistant to the Assistant County Administrator Sarah Taylor, provided an update on the Mickler's Wharf Ponte Vedra Greenway Alliance request and the Commercial use of the Vilano Floating Dock that are slated for the June 21, 2022 Board of County Commission meeting.

New Business

Lindblad introduced the Natural Resources Staff.

Danielle Fountain, Recreation Facilities Coordinator gave an overview of her responsibilities that includes processing Special Event Applications for beach events, Pier Pavilion, Vilano Fishing Pier, beach pavilions and boat ramps. She coordinates details relating to special event permits with St. Augustine Beach Police, City of St. Augustine Police, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, and Marine & Fire Rescue to ensure safety and security and to minimize impacts to the beach. Fountain said that she answers the main line for Beach Services, submits requisitions for purchase orders, handles purchase card receipts and statements, payroll and schedules delivery of beach accessible wheelchairs. Fountain is a lifelong resident of St. Johns County. She became involved with the County several years ago as a volunteer for the Sea Turtle Wash Back Program.

Donna Rhein, Natural Resource Maintenance Supervisor, shared that she has 20+ years of experience in the environmental and parks fields. She has worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Park Service, South Carolina Park Service, and the Georgia Park Service. She explained that she oversees the beaches. She supervises four employees. She works with staff to provide the public beach and waterway access. Staff monitors beach driving conditions and posts situation reports regularly on social media. They adjust driving lanes as needed and post signs for conservation and driving lane zones. Staff performs routine inspections for beachfront parks, walk overs, footpaths and boat ramp parks and schedules maintenance. She stated that staff remove debris from the beach, assists with sea turtle activities, dune protection and invasive plant removal and monitoring. They coordinate with many departments within the county, law enforcement, and other outside agencies. They deliver and pick up the beach accessible wheelchairs and provide information and education to the public.

Chapin asked about the Sea Turtle program in Ponte Vedra and Lindblad provided details.

Dockins asked about installing more trash receptacles & port-o-lets along the beaches and about lifeguards. Rhein explained the placement of port-o-lets and said that he could contact her directly for trash cans if needed. Lindblad explained the roving lifeguard crew and full staffing beginning Memorial Day weekend. Dockins asked if the port-o-lets were available to the public and staff confirmed that all port-o-lets are public with the exception of any port-o-lets placed by contractors working on the beach.

Discussion relating to driving on the beach and stories about vehicles getting stuck on the beach occurred.

Steve Jones, Natural Resource Maintenance Supervisor, shared that he has a Master's Degree in Parks & Recreation Administration from Penn State. He has been in the recreation field for 25+ in Montana, New York, Pennsylvania, and now Florida. He said that he has 12 years in law enforcement. He said that he was impressed by the department's attention to public complaints and issues and that he had never worked anywhere that responded so readily to the littlest of details of public concern. He explained that he is responsible for the maintenance and safety from the beach walkovers back to the St. Johns River, which is approximately 42 sites. His staff is responsible for ground maintenance, trees, fences, holes, missing parts, bolts, screws, playground equipment and this includes repairs where possible. Jones and crew respond to public complaints and inspects and repairs vandalized property. Staff reports graffiti and destruction of property to Facilities Maintenance for repair through the work order system. He mentioned working with the Friends of Alpine Groves, the St. Johns County Sheriff's office, City of St. Augustine Beach Police and the City of St. Augustine Police Department. He said that he interacts with the public in the parks to obtain information about what we are doing right and wrong. He encourages maintenance staff to speak with the public and explain what they're doing and why whenever possible.

Long asked how staff learns of community complaints. Jones stated that he receives emails and also through the PRIDE System. Lindblad explained that it is a program on the County website that allows the public to enter their concerns online and have it directed to the appropriate department. Dockins asked about invasive tree removal programs. Jones stated that they work to eradicate Brazilian Peppers in concert with the Park Naturalist. He said that the county could use an invasive species team. Waldron stated that he was proud of the work staff does and Van Rysdam thanked staff for their work. Watkins said there is a foreign invasive team in AmeriCorps and that the county could apply for the grant and she is happy to assist. Chapin asked about horses on the beach. Lindblad explained that there was no

Mickler's access for horses at this time due to the renourishment project and that Butler Park East is closed until October due to the amount of people who visit the beach beginning in March for Spring Breaks followed by summer vacationers. Kane recognized the value and hard work of the Natural Resources team accomplishing so much with so few staff members.

Ryan Kane, Parks & Recreation Director, provided an FY 23 Budget Update and thanked the Recreation Advisory Board members who attended the budget workshop. He explained that the department has requested large budget increases in maintenance, and FTE staffing. He mentioned the request to separate Natural Resources from the Beaches Division and add FTE's to the Beach Division so that they can operate successfully. Natural Resources will be part of the Parks and Recreation's Maintenance Program.

The Deferred Maintenance budget request for increases was discussed. The budget has been increased both for Facilities Maintenance and our Recreation Maintenance Division to include parking lots and fence lines. He said that a Maintenance Renewal/Replacement program has been created to address needs countywide and that it would be priority based. Van Rysdam asked for an Org Chart. Kane replied that he will provide an Org Chart and Executive Summary to the board within the week.

Old Business

Van Rysdam recapped last meetings discussion of the TDC Category III Grant Application and supporting documentation revisions. Meyer reviewed the most recent revision for the RAB members and asked for recommendations. Meyer reviewed the proposed changes that included staff signing off on required documentation and asked for comments or suggestions. Discussion ensued. Staff will look into creating an online application process with access and approval portal. There was a consensus of the Board to accept the revised version of the application. A short discussion on requiring recognition of the TDC and SJC with the use of logos and other media methods followed. Commissioner Waldron supported requiring a link to the St. Johns County web page on advertising and live streaming to promote St. Johns County as a vacation destination.

Staff Reports

Kane announced that a Proclamation to Celebrate 50 years of Parks and Recreation in St. Johns County and Parks and Recreation Month would be read at the June 21, 2022 Board of County Commission meeting. He said that Commissioner Waldron will read the Proclamation recognizing our first inductee into the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Hall of Fame, Red Cox whose family has been invited to attend. He provided an update on the dedication of the Escambia Walkover and mentioned that the walkover was built by private citizens and gifted to St. Johns County. He announced that June 22, 2022 is our new Business Manager Carolyn Miska's starting date. He shared that she was an employee of the state park system as an accountant and that Ms. Miska has had a long Parks and Recreation career and is a passionate professional. Kane provided a one-page sheet on Strategic Planning and explained that this would align with the Master Plan. He said that Van Rysdam would be working with the department to help identify KPI's and the metrics needed to get to the next level. Discussion relating to the process, economic impact and development continued.

Baccari provided a golf course update and explained that the seeding of first nine holes of the golf course has been completed and sod has been placed around holes that have been finished and that the work continues. She mentioned that the Mussallem Beachfront Parking Lot Phase II construction has started and that the Doug Crane parking lot improvements and floating dock project will begin at the end of October. She announced that the Flagler Estates Community Center will be completed at the end of June and Summer Camp will be scheduled at this location next year. The Council on Aging relocated to the Al Wilke Community Center for their programming and will now be able to offer BINGO as an activity. The Naturalists are holding a Middle School Fish Camp at Trout Creek this week. Summer Camp starts June 13, 2022. The programming schedule for the Celebration of the 50 years of St. Johns County Parks &

Recreation was read aloud. A group discussion regarding the programs offered during the 50th Celebration followed.

Lindblad provided a Memorial Day Weekend Beach Update and a revenue comparison. She said that the Pier Park shuttle was hardly utilized but that the shuttle to Mickler's Beach was very well attended. Staff was reassessing the beach location. Chapin stated that she saw no signs to tell people about the shuttle and Lindblad responded that there were signs posted and visible including locations at Mickler's Beach parking lot and A1A at Cornerstone. She explained that the shuttles ran every 20 minutes. Waldron asked about lifetime passes and whether or not they were still honored and Lindblad said they were still good. Dockins asked if the Beaches tracked the revenue for the Music and the Pier and food service. Lindblad explained that the pier location was rented by the Civic Association and they hired Food Trucks and this was outside of the County,

Board Member Reports

Long announced that the Park Foundation was officially a 501(c)3, had opened a bank account and was now in the process of hiring an Executive Director.

Chapin spoke about the Mickler's Wharf and asked for RAB support. Discussion relating to the request for the County to take the property followed. Kane stated that it was being looked into by the County and that it was currently scheduled for the June 21 BOCC meeting.

Dockins asked for the Parks and Recreation Department to host Senior Games in St. Johns County. Kane stated that more detail was needed and he would work with Dockins to see if it's possible.

Watkins asked about Beach Volleyball net replacement and Lindblad said new nets, poles and boundaries lines are ready to install once the current beach volleyball season is over mid-August.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Dockins, seconded by McEachean, approved 5/0. Meeting ended at 3:15 PM.