



RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD JUNE 12, 2024 MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Chair Watkins called the meeting to order and took the roll. Members present: Lauren Watkins, Chair; Casey Van Rysdam, Hal Dockins, Marty McEachean, Marithza Ross. Members absent: Bill Bowen and Brad Long, Vice Chair.

Also Present

District 1 Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, David Simpkins, School District Liaison; Jamie Baccari, Asst. Parks & Recreation Director; Timothy Connor, Project Manager; Tess Simpson, Community Program Manager; Teddy Meyer Recreation Facilities Manager and Diane Gorski, Project Specialist.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Dockins motioned to approve the May 8, 2024 minutes with a second by by McEachean and approved 5/0.

Public Comment

The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and stated that each speaker would have 3 minutes. Krista Osgood, Ponte Vedra Beach resident who resides behind the Cornerstone Athletic Facility complained about the noise nuisance caused by players using the tennis courts, batting cages and ballfields and said that it is causing her personal health issues. She went into great detail about her issues with the noise and the County Staff she has contacted to remedy her concerns. The Chair thanked the resident for taking the time to share her issues. A lengthy discussion relating to this complaint followed.

Margo Geer, St. Augustine South resident thanked the county for the ongoing projects and asked when the Notice to Proceed for the Shore Drive Trail project would be issued and when construction was going to start. Baccari said they are waiting for the State to approve the grant application documentation. Geer said she suggested the county guarantee the \$400,000 of grant funds to Commissioner Alaimo who agreed to speak with Administrator Andrews. Whitehurst clarified that guaranteeing the funding could result in another project losing funding if the grant money did not come through. He explained that the Board had already approved the project and continue to support the project. A brief discussion followed.

Reports

Christian Whitehurst, County Commission Liaison said that the Parks & Recreation Department was in the unique opportunity to exist to make citizens lives better by offering lifestyle enhancements.

David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison, provided updates on the Spring State Championships: Bartram Trails Girls Lacrosse, Creekside Girls Track & Field are State Champions and also had 3 individual players win state championships: Janay Moorer (400 m), Sarah Rose (800m) and Allyson Johnson (1600 m & 3200 m). Allen d. Neases' Finn Thomas won the Boys' Track & Field Individual State Championship with Sam Lewis sinning the Boys' Weightlifting Individual State Championship. Ponte Vedra High Schools' Pole Vaulter Nicholas DeSanto won the Boys' Track & Field Individual State Championship. Discussion evolving around comparisons with other districts in Florida and the challenges presented followed. Simpkins reminded everyone of the Wednesday public access to to High School amenities from 5-7 pm through July excluding July 4th week. He announced that school starts Monday August 12th.

Lauren Watkins, Chair recognized and thanked Van Rysdam for agreeing to be the RAB representative to head the TDT CAT III Event Application review process.

Parks & Rec APP

Simpson introduced the new Parks & Rec APP and provided an overview of the product, the options that are available and instructions on how to access it on a cellphone. She handed out stickers and rack cards with the QR Codes and mentioned that the QR Code was also available on the web. Watkins asked how best to search on the app. Simpson explained that the App is focused on providing a tour of the parks and recreation facilities available in St. Johns County. She mentioned that CivicRec, the reservation system for programming and rentals, includes a breakdown of the amenities at each location. Watkins asked for statistic access. Baccari said that it will be included in the programming statistics that were already being collected. The group discussed the website, Beach App and other possibilities to help quantify the number of people access the parks and facilities within the county.

Comprehensive Plan/Level of Service Update

Baccari gave a brief update on the status of the department's input on the Comprehensive Plan/Level of Service. She explained that Phase 2 would include the updates for Section F: Recreation Open Space and that the department would include input received from the RAB at that time. She said that all recommendations needed to be submitted by the December 2025 and that staff would keep the RAB informed. She expressed her hope that Phase 2 would allow additional input and that Van Rysdam would be given the opportunity to share his suggestions during this phase.

Project Updates

Timothy Connor, Project Manager provided an overview of Parks & Recreation Department projects using a handout (Exhibit A) that was distributed to the group. The information was provided for the following categories: Projects Completed by 10/01/24; Projects In Construction by 12/31/24; Projects In Design & Permitting; Hybrid Project Delivery and Projects Fully Designed & Permitted. Each section was followed by a brief Q&A. Connor highlighted the San Sebastian Boat Ramp & Park project. He shared that the FCT Grant Application for this project was currently ranked #1 and if fully approved would result in \$3.5 million in reimbursement funding. Baccari stated that the FCT grant panel's final ranking meeting is next month. Van Rysdam asked if the department had a grant writer. Baccari answered no. She explained that the county has a legislative affairs office that employs a grant writing team and that the department and the team work together. A brief discussion about grants and the proposed park followed.

Staff Report

Assistant Director Jamie Baccari provided the following updates:

July is Parks & Recreation Month. The Proclamation will be heard at the June 18th meeting. She explained that the Passport to Parks and Passport to Geocaching programs would be highlighted along with other programs happening throughout the month of July. Baccari announced that Bert Watson would be the 3rd year Hall of Fame inductee and that his widow will be present at the June 18th meeting.

Baccari said the department is working towards getting a credit card company on board that will allow us to accept credit cards at the beach toll booths. She said that this option will allow for real time counts at the beach both coming and going. It will also give the department the ability to sell passes for 1 and 3 days as well as annual passes. The goal is to be live with this process next summer.

The Board discussed the many improvements to the parks system and shared their support for the work that the Parks and Recreation Department employees accomplish. They also recognized the partnerships with outside entities that that enhanced programming and strengthened the community .

McEachan motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Dockins. Motion approved 5/0.