



RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MAY 8, 2024 MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was Called to Order at 1:30 p.m. by Chair Watkins who then took roll call. The following RAB members were in attendance: Lauren Watkins, Chair; Brad Long, Vice Chair; Casey Van Rysdam, Bill Bowen, Marithza Ross. Harold Dockins was absent and Marty McEachean arrived at 1:48 p.m.

Also Present

David Simpkins, School Board Liaison and the following Parks & Recreation Staff Members: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; David Cañon, Maintenance Superintendent; Nathan Otter, Natural Resources Superintendent; Bobby McFarland, Sports Tourism Development Specialist and Diane Gorski, Project Specialist.

Approval of Previous Minutes

Long made a motion to approve the April 10, 2024 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Bowen and approved 5/0.

Public Comments

The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and stated that each speaker would have 3 minutes.

Local resident Suzanne Clulow spoke of her appreciation for the social media posts and the programming that the Parks & Recreation Department offers to the community. She said that the community is looking forward to the enhancements at Treaty Park. She mentioned that the tone on social media has become more positive towards Parks & Recreation projects. She asked for more information on the FY24 budget and Shore Drive Trail project status. Kane said he would cover this in his budget presentation.

Margot Geer, St. Augustine South resident, echoed everything that Ms. Clulow said and expressed her concern that the Shore Drive Trail project has not yet been started. She asked the county to develop the park space that is undeveloped within the neighborhood and provide enhancements for the community. Van Rysdam asked if there were specific needs. Geer explained that the residents want the whole area developed with recreational amenities. Baccari explained how the project process works and listed the current projects. She explained that the community would be asked to provide input in future amenities through surveys and public meetings.

Reports

David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison announced that Coach Terry Sapp was awarded the Dr. Joseph G. Joyner Sportsmanship Award and that the David Mathis Student-Athlete Pursuing Victory with Honor Award -2024 was bestowed upon Macie Norman from St. Augustine High School. Simpkins provided the following State Playoff updates:

Baseball - 7A – Bartram Trail 6, Winter Park 2; Spruce Creek 7, Creekside 3; Creekside hosts Lake Mary Friday at 7 p.m.; 6A – Toco Creek 4, Chiles 11; 5A – St. Augustine 4, Escambia 5; Beachside 2, Columbia 0; Ponte Vedra 7, Clay 11; Beachside travels to Clay Friday at 7 p.m.

Softball - 5/8/24, 5A – Menendez at Wakulla; 5/9/24, 7A – Timbercreek at Creekside

Beach Volleyball – Beachside and Ponte Vedra both made the state playoffs, both lost in the first round.

Boys Lacrosse - St. Augustine, Menendez, Creekside lost in the first round. Ponte Vedra lost in the Regional Final.

Girls Lacrosse - Both St. Augustine & Creekside lost in the first round. Toco lost in the second round. Ponte Vedra lost in the Regional Final. Bartram Trail made the final four on May 10th vs. Vero Beach in Naples, FL. They will be playing for their 3rd State Championship.

Girls Tennis – Nease made the state quarter final & Ponte Vedra made the state semifinal.

Boys Tennis – Ponte Vedra made the state final.

Track & Field State Playoffs begin this week.

Boys Volleyball - Bartram Trail beat Lake Brantly 3 sets to 2. They travel to Lake Howell in Winterpark Friday at 7 p.m.; Creekside beat Gulf Creek 3/0. Creekside hosts Lake Mary Friday at 7 p.m.

Boys Weightlifting – Sam Lewis, Nease High School, State Champion, 129 pounds.

Simpkins announced that select School District Outdoor facilities will be open to the public most Wednesdays in June and also July 8-24. He said that an announcement would be posted soon.

Lauren Watkins, Chair reported that she had chatted with the Comprehensive Plan Consultants regarding the Level of Service and the Comprehensive Plan process. She said that the discussion was fruitful and that she was able to identify the gaps and service needs relating to recreation moving forward. She let the consultants know that Van Rysdam was also available to discuss recreational needs.

Staff Introductions

Michael Cheeseman, Parks Maintenance Supervisor, Jay Colee, Parks Maintenance Supervisor and Kelly Ussia, Natural Resources Programming Supervisor shared their background, education, experience and provided a brief overview of what their job entails and the role they play in their respective divisions. A brief Q&A period followed each speaker.

Bi-Annual Strategic Dashboard Update

Carrie Miska, Business Manager, provided an overview of the Parks & Recreation Strategic Dashboard that contained data collected from the first half of the fiscal year. (Attachment A) A five-year Organizational Development budget was reviewed. (Attachment B) A brief Q&A period followed.

FY25 Budget/Capital Improvement Projects

Ryan Kane, Director, Parks & Recreation referenced the handout that included the approved annual budgets for FY23, FY24 and the proposed FY25 budget. (Attachment C) This document included a breakdown of capital, operating and personnel expenses and showed the increases over three years. Kane then introduced the draft FY25 Budget with a PowerPoint Presentation. (Attachment D) The presentation was followed by a questions and recommendations for improvements by the RAB. There was a consensus of the RAB to have the Chair draft a letter of recommendation for the proposed FY25 Budget to the Board of County Commissioners.

Staff Reports

Kane provided an update on the Shore Drive Trail Project. He said that we are waiting for the Notice to Proceed to send to the contractor. Everything is in place to move forward. He mentioned that the Parks & Recreation Department and design team were hosting a community open house on May 17th to show the design and layout in more detail. A brief Q&A period followed.

Kane spoke to the direction given by the Board of County Commissioners to look at the possibility of adding libraries to three of the regional parks sites a 22,000 SF library in Nocatee Park, 3,000 SF at Central Community Center and a 7,000 SF library building at the NW Regional Park. He explained that staff is working with O'Sports for design and cost. Kane said this new design will create a new community hub and requires both departments working in harmony with each other to make it work. Ross asked for a post office to be added. Kane shared his concerns for the need to stay focused and concentrate on the projects at hand so that the parks can be developed and not further sidetracked. He clarified that adding the libraries will affect the park design and result in a loss of elements in the park. Discussion ensued.

Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, provided the following updates:

The Canright House has been successfully moved to the Collier, Blocker, Puryear Site

Deleon Shores Park Renovation Public Meeting update

Just Tri It – 2024 Kids Triathlon held at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center had 64 participants aged 5-14 who swam, ran & biked.

Reel in the Fun – 2024 Kids' Catch & Release Fishing Tournament had 37 participants who caught 58 fish weighing 27#.

Baccari then shared these upcoming events:

5/1/24 – 2024 Bartram Living History Fest at Alpine Groves Park from 10 am – 1 pm; Movie at Veterans Par at 8:15 pm (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles- Mutant Mayhem)

5/17/24 – Teen Night 6-8 pm at W.E. Harris Gym

5/18/24 – Dinner and a Movie at 7:30 pm (The Little Mermaid) at the Solomon Calhoun Community Center; Native Landscaping at Beluthahatchee Park Hart House at 10 am

May 22 – Playground Storytime 10-11 am at Collier, Blocker, Puryear Park

5/23/24 – Paddleboard Fishing 10 am – 1 pm Helen Melon Schmidt Park

5/24/24 – Veterans Art – 10 am – 11:30 am Military Veterans will be shown how to make unique pieces of art out of simple bars of soap

5/29/24 – Sunset Bike Tour 7 – 8:30 pm Cora Harrison Preserve

5/29-30/24 – Dolphin Walk – Vilano Beach Pavilion 730 – 8:30 pm

Baccari said that staff is preparing for the June 3rd start of Summer Camp 2024. Camp ends July 26th.

RAB Member Reports

Long stated that the Canrite House move went smoothly. Discussion ensued. Van Rysdam asked the status of the Civil Rights Museum location site. Baccari stated that St. Johns County was ranked 1st out of three counties and that the decision could be made soon. Long shared that the Park Foundation was revisiting their Regional Plan and reworking the Executive Director Job Description to make sure that there are specific measurables that reflect the expectation of the job to be performed before advertising the position.

Bowen asked if the RAB no longer had representation from administration. Kane replied that Administration restructured and now has two Deputy Administrators and not three. He said that Brad Bradley, Deputy County Administrator was the Parks and Recreation direct report. Van Rysdam said he had mentioned to Commissioner Whitehurst how active and proactive Sarah Taylor was in attending the RAB meetings and emphasized how invaluable her participation was to the RAB. He said that Commissioner Whitehurst promised to convey the message that the RAB would like to have this resource maintained. Bowen mentioned the Shriner's BBQ, Drum Runners and Disc Golf lessons at the fairgrounds this weekend and urged everyone to attend.

McEachean apologized for his tardiness and said that he was at a CRA meeting at Murray Middle School. He said the West Augustine community was excited about the potential for the African American Museum coming to St. Augustine. He said discussion with the Florida Memorial College regarding land use was ongoing. He said the museum committee would review the top three sites on May 21st and provide their recommendation to the state.

Van Rysdam said that he had received a call from a constituent inquiring about traffic relating to the new proposed Regional Parks. He asked if traffic studies had been completed at the regional park locations. Kane replied that a study was in the works for the central park location. Baccari said that traffic realignments and turning lanes were being reviewed and would be included where necessary. Van Rysdam stated that the future Comprehensive Plan needed to be a priority. Baccari responded that the department was working on recommendations and priorities to provide to Growth Management in the allotted time frame. Kane said the recommendations will be shared with the RAB, and the RAB will be able to share their endorsements with the BOCC who will finalize the plan. Watkins restated that she discussed Level of Service with the consultant.

A motion by McEachean to adjourn the meeting was seconded by Long approved 6/0.