



Recreation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes November 13, 2024

Call to order

Members Present: Watkins, Chair; Brad Long, Vice Chair, Harold Dockins, and Casey Van Rysdam.

Members Absent: Bill Bowen & Marty McEachean

Also Present: Commissioner Christian Whitehurst and David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison

Recreation Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director, Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, Carrie Miska, Business Manager, Teddy Meyer, Rec Facilities Manager, Bobby McFarland, Sports Tourism Development Specialist, and Diane Gorski, Project Specialist

Approval of the Minutes

Lauren Watkins, Chair, called for approval of the September 11, 2024, meeting minutes and received a motion from Long who was seconded by Dockins. Motion passed 4/0.

Director Ryan Kane announced that the agenda had been changed to exclude interviewing the applicants for the open District 1 and 4 RAB seats. He said that the positions are being advertised for an additional 30 days. Watkins asked in the open positions could be posted on Facebook and other social media to garner more attention to the vacancies and the newsletter. Discussion followed. Kane stated that staff would add to social media and the newsletter. She asked for the Facebook link to be provided to the RAB.

Public Comments

Watkins called for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and explained that each speaker would be given 3 minutes. Ellen Chiafar spoke to her desire for the county to build roller hockey rinks as her son, who lives in Miami, would have somewhere to play when he visits. She stated that the men that operate the Igloo Rink in Jacksonville are interested in expanding their business into St. Johns County. She spoke to the ease in building a rink and said that the county should fund this project. A lengthy discussion about the need, cost, and land needed and available for roller hockey rinks ensued.

Watkins invited Dirk Lobenbruck to address the RAB as he was an applicant for the vacant District 1 RAB seat.

Reports

Christian Whitehurst, County Commission Liaison, said he was able to get out and see the new rectangle field at Plantation Park and that the community is happy about having another turf field. Whitehurst announced the new Mill Creek Park opening is being scheduled for late November. He mentioned that at the last commission meeting the commissioners were able to hold the Twin Creeks developer accountable due to the developers lack of meeting their athletic field obligations by putting the Impact Fee transfer on

hold until the work is completed. Van Rysdam asked if Whitehurst would continue as the RAB liaison following the past election cycle. Whitehurst responded that he would very much like to remain as the liaison, but that the new Chair would be making those decisions. The RAB thanked Whitehurst for his continued support and for his service to the RAB and community.

Van Rysdam asked for the status of the Comprehensive Plan and Baccari explained that the Growth Management was overseeing the process, and input would most likely be limited to staff comments. Kane will provide an overview of the Recreation staff recommendations and edits provided to Growth Management at the December meeting.

David Simpkins, St. Johns County School District Liaison, provided updates on the Fall State Playoffs and upcoming schedules for St. Johns County School Sports.

Lauren Watkins, Chair, provided a shout out to the department noting all the different types of programming being offered and the information provided within the newsletters being shared with the public. She thanked Whitehurst for his service to the community and to the RAB. She announced that Long would not be attending the December meeting.

Strategic Dashboard

Carrie Miska, Business Manager, provided an overview of the Strategic Dashboard for Fiscal Year 2024 (attached). Van Rysdam thanked Miska for providing the data sheet with ratios. He asked about the increase in grants and Miska replied that the department received a \$3.5 million grant for the San Sebastian River property. Baccari explained that Administration encourages departments to look for and apply for grants. Kane mentioned that the county has an Intergovernmental Affairs department that works with Recreation and actively seeks grants. Van Rysdam questioned why field rentals were down 6%. Miska answered that there were field closures due to hurricanes and Kane added that the department is making improvements and project updates and that fields are closed during the renovations. Meyer explained that as the partnerships with the County increase the field rentals decrease as partners pay a per player fee. Van Rysdam confirmed that all the two-year beach passes had expired. Dockins stated that the Pier Passes were down due to the lack of water beneath it. Baccari shared that next summer, beach passes will be sold using digital technology and that credit cards will be accepted allowing staff to better track sales as well as daily entries to the beach. She said it would take some time to introduce the new system and determine what data is collected and how best to utilize the information. Discussion relating to the data provided followed.

Project Updates

Ryan Kane, Director, announced that the Bond for the four regional parks and Davis Park had been approved, documents signed, and the loan is in place. He said that staff hopes to start the work at the two central park facilities in January or February. He anticipates that the Sportsplex and the Central Community Center located off SR 16 will be completed first. He said that there is a push to rename the sites and ideas are welcome. He reviewed the County naming policy.

Kane provided an update on the San Sebastian River Front property development sharing that staff is currently working on a master plan for the site and is also working with FDOT to determine the best way to get boat traffic in and out of the site. He said that the master plan also assists staff in pursuing grants. He mentioned that this could potentially be a \$30 million project.

Kane confirmed that the grass field at Plantation Park has been converted to an artificial turf field. The Plantation and Mill Creek Parks fields are the first time using an organic fill that promises to be cooler than the rubber material that is generally used. The department will schedule the artificial turf fields for summer use in place of grass fields which will allow the much-needed maintenance of the grass fields to occur. Watkins asked what the fill material was made from and Kane responded that it's a wood-based material that doesn't hold heat. Mill Creek Athletic Park will be turned over to the department in February. The park includes a large multipurpose field, two each softball and baseball fields. Both projects will be celebrated with a grand opening event scheduled to coincide with the lacrosse and baseball seasons.

Mussallem Park Phase III is underway and includes restrooms, nature boardwalk and recreational amenities. The completion of Phases I & II added 50 parking spots.

Shore Drive Trail project grant funding application is still under review and the Notice to Proceed has not been issued. The County is responding to requests for email communications and documents related to the project from the Florida Highway Administration & Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). DEP has requested a full survey of the trail site. Dockins asked how the grant application would be extended beyond the expiration date and Kane explained that the department would ask the Board of County Commissioners in February for approval to request an extension. Van Rysdam for the status of the Save the Ron Parker Park group and Kane explained that the group no longer exists. He shared that site drainage is currently being evaluated and includes the parking lot.

Van Rysdam asked if the Vilano Floating Dock access issue had been resolved and Kane it has been workshopped with Commissioner Arnold and that the county is working towards a solution and that the Sheriff's Office is not currently issuing citations. He then asked the status of the Nocatee Sand Volleyball Courts and Meyers responded that the project should get started in the 6-8 weeks and be completed in 180 days. Van Rysdam then asked about the Disk Golf project and Kane said that the direction given to the department is to build the course with \$700,000 of TDT money. He said that staff is evaluating another site and that once completed it will be included in the report planned to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

Dockins asked about croquet courts. Kane shared that the department presented the option of creating a croquet facility at Rock Springs Park and that the Board approved \$100,000 for design and engineering and a site feasibility study and provide the public an opportunity to weigh in.

TDC Category III Sports Funding Program Grant Conversation

Meyer provided an update on the grant funding process. He explained that the TDC had had pulled three grants from the recommendations – Perfect Game Bold City Classic, Florida Prime Cup, Jacksonville Classic at their September 16th meeting. He explained that staff reached out to each applicant to explain the concerns the TDC had with the applications. He said that Angel Natal of Perfect Game presented to the TDC at the October 21st meeting to announce that the tournament named had been changed to the Sunshine State Fall Classic. The name was changed to eliminated Sikes-Cline's concern over Bold City being associated with Jacksonville. The TDC approved the allotted \$13,500 for the tournament. Meyer said that the Jacksonville Classic decided to return to Jacksonville and was no longer eligible for the grant. He said that Felipe Nunez spoke on behalf of Florida Prime and discussions regarding the use of local hotel rooms was emphasized. Staff will continue to work with Prime to give them access to tournament fields all over the county to increase the bed tax collection. The TDC approved \$10,000 of the \$16,000 that there were originally eligible for. A discussion about what the TDC considers important in approving the sports

grant funding followed. Baccari explained that she would be hosting a workshop to refine the definition of the TDT Category III grants, ensuring alignment with the priorities and requirements of both the RAB and the TDC. She mentioned that Troy Blevins and Dylan Rumrell would be representing the TDC. Watkins replied that she and Van Rysdam would like to represent the RAB. Van Rysdam shared his thoughts on the TDC methods and the wholistic view of the RAB. A lengthy discussion ensued. Baccari will set the date for the workshop and notify the attendees.

Staff Reports

Ryan Kane, Director shared that the County Administrator reorganized County Administration and appointed Jesse Dunn a Deputy County Administrator and Sarah Taylor as an Assistant County Administrator to serve along with Brad Bradley, Deputy County Administrator who Parks and Recreation and Beaches directly reports to. He shared that Parks and Recreation will be introducing new staff members soon. He announced that a Land Manager has been hired, and he will focus on the departments grant obligations and land management requirements to include things like controlled burns.

Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director, announced that this weekend's Color Run event scheduled at the County Fairgrounds is the last community outdoor event. She stated that staff is readying for Phone calls to Santa this month and said additional volunteers were still needed. Baccari also shared that youth and adult basketball, and adult flag football seasons are starting soon. Kane added that sound boards have been installed at the Solomon Calhoun gymnasium.

RAB Member Reports

Long announced that Marithza Ross has been named the St. Johns County Parks Foundation Director. He said that the Foundation was working on revamping the strategic plan. He mentioned that the Foundation is actively looking to expand the board and was open to suggestions. Watkins asked for the qualifications or specialties that would benefit the board and Long responded an attorney, accountant and other business professionals were being sought to serve.

Dockins motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Long. Motion passed 4/0.