



Recreation Advisory Board (RAB) Meeting Minutes February 12, 2025

Call to order

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

Also Present: Commission Chair Krista Joseph, School District Liaison David Simkins

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

Approval of the Minutes

Watkins called for approval of the January 15, 2025, meeting minutes and received a motion from Bowen who was seconded by Dockins. Motion passed 5/0.

Public Comments

The Chair called for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and provided instructions. She asked the RAB to wait until reports to ask questions to mirror the Board of County Commissioner procedure and to help streamline the process by eliminating back and forth dialogue.

Tony Taylor, President and DOC of Florida Legends Football Club and Tony Taylor Training Academy shared his success as a world-renowned soccer player for professional leagues. He expressed his passion for the sport and pleaded for a youth sports partnership and designated field space in St. Johns County to continue to grow his football club and training, camps and clinics. He brought four (4) parents of students in his program who highly praised his work with their children and conveyed their support for his club expanding throughout St. Johns County.

St. Augustine South area resident Matt Moss stated that he had questions for the Commissioner and Director. Watkins explained that direct questions and answers would not be allowed during public comment, but that they may be discussed later. Moss shared his thoughts about the failure of the Shore Drive Trail grant extension request, requested clarification on community comments and the Commissioners position on safety. He shared his opinion that Shore Drive was not safe for walkers, runners, bicyclists or handicapped people. He questioned the lack of sidewalks due to the cost to construct.

Watkins announced that the athletic association partnership status be moved to the March meeting so that the new members could be included in the conversation. She asked Kane to provide a presentation that gave an overview of the program and policy.

Reports

Krista Joseph, Commission Chair stated that the developer of Twin Creeks promised the county space to make soccer fields that is right now just sitting there just dirt in an empty lot. She suggested that Tony Taylor's group open dialogue with the County if they could come up with funding to get the fields built. Regarding Shore Drive Trail, the Commissioner stated that safety was very important to her and that speed bumps and signage could be considered. She did not support the grant as it meant that very specific requirements needed to be adhered to in obtaining the grant funds. She said she supported a sidewalk or another form of trail that was not a paved 10' wide trail. She mentioned that there were other options that could be considered. She expressed her appreciation of the beauty of the park.

David Simkins, School District Liaison provided a summary of the state play-offs results and upcoming events.

Watkins shared that she would have the draft RAB annual report ready for review during next month's meeting. She congratulated staff on the good feedback received from the public on Cornerstone Park. She asked Commissioner Joseph for an update on the status of the upcoming Comprehensive Plan amendment. Joseph announced that Inspire report (Comprehensive Plan update drafts) was on the upcoming Board of County Commissioners agenda. She shared that the upcoming agenda item would be the precursor to the redline version and that the final hearing date had not yet been set. She asked for input from the RAB. Discussion followed. Joseph welcomed feedback from the RAB and encouraged them to email her with any recommendations or corrections.

Final report for TDC awards for Phase II TDT Category III Grant applications

McFarland provided a handout that included the grant amount awarded by the TDC that mirrored the recommendations given by the review committee. He stated that this completed the second cycle for the year. He said that there would be a TDT Category III Grant Application working group meeting later this month with the goal of streamlining the process and tightening up the requirements for the grant. Baccari announced that the workshop was scheduled for February 26th from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 pm. She said that the group includes two members of the TDT Board members, VanRysdam, and staff. The current process will be presented along with the pros and cons for the purpose of obtaining some clarification on necessary adjustments and the way in which the grant is handled. She said that staff would meet with the RAB Chair the following day and the results will be brought back to the RAB for consideration and recommendation. Discussion ensued.

Beaches Major Impact Event Applications

Kane provided an overview of the event applications for the Game On Triathlon 2025 – May (Mickler's Beach), July & October (Vilano Beach) and Old School Kingfish Tournament 2025 – Vilano Fishing Pier all of which are repeat events. The group entertained a brief dialogue about the events and the process in obtaining grants and approval of the BCC.

There was a motion by Long to recommend the approval of the Beaches Major Impact Event Applications as presented. Dockins seconded the motion. Motion carried 5/0.

Staff Reports

Kane informed that the RAB will be receiving invitations to the grand opening of Mill Creek Park with Villages Baseball opening ceremonies on the morning of March 1 and groundbreaking for the installation of an artificial turf football field at Solomon Calhoun on March 3. Kane announced that the Early works packages for the four regional park projects have gone out and include utilities and site clearing. He stated that the ADA ramp for Crescent Beach had been approved and that once constructed the County will have 4 ADA access ramps. The purchase of the Bishop Estates waterfront property with LAMP dollars was approved by the BCC. The purchase includes two parcels on Julington Creek and provides waterway access and the vision is to have an ADA kayak launch and nature center. Nocatee Sand Volleyball Court construction has started. The group discussed the volleyball court project and regional park timeline.

Baccari announced that the Ocean Pier gift shop was closed while undergoing some internal improvements. She mentioned the annual Kite Day Celebration at 10 a.m. on March 8th at Treaty Park. She mentioned that a press conference will be held to celebrate being named a Certified Autism Center. The Certified Autism Center (CAC) designation recognizes organizations that have successfully completed extensive training from leading autism experts. Each CAC ensures all families with autism and other sensory disorders are properly accommodated. She said that this event was done in partnership with the Park Foundation who were able to find a sponsorship that ensure that the first 100 attendees will receive a kite. She shared that youth basketball registration was open and that the department was looking for coaches. Interested parties should reach out to the programming department. She stated that the Summer Camp Lottery would be opening February 24th and closing at 9 p.m. on March 7th. She said that names will be randomly drawn in the first two weeks of March. She mentioned that department was partnering with the AARP to provide Tax Services at the Solomon Calhoun Center February 18th through March,

Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Conversation relating to Summer Camp availability, registration and need ensued.

Dockins asked for an update on application for the National Association of Recreation and Parks grant as part of the Arthritis Foundation "Walk With Ease" program. Baccari said that the department had one person certified at this time, but the grant was being impacted by the freeze on federal grants and that resources are limited.

RAB Member Reports

Long announced that the Park Foundation was still looking for board members. He said that a strategy meeting was scheduled in April. He stated that Marithza Ross was busy working on building partnerships and developing a business model. He said the Foundation will be working with a CPA to help with the financials. He said that they recently adopted the new bylaws. The group discussed the needs and qualifications for new board members.

Bowen said he walked the south part of the Shores Trail last week and that it is beautiful. He hoped that some sort of trail could be built there. He said that he and a couple of disc golf club members had walked around the Rivertown Park property with Meyer and staff and the property is beautiful. He said that the location is good for a disc golf course and that one could be created by local players and built for a reasonable price. He said that the group is working up cost estimates for adding two (2) tees, signs, and baskets per hole. He asked about the golf course disc golf project and Kane responded that he has been directed to put it out to bid.

Van Rysdam said he hoped a trail would be built at Shore Drive. He asked the chair to allow questioning of the public commenters after their comments. He didn't think people should have to sit through a meeting to wait for questions. Dockins concurred. Watkins said that there was discussion on realigning the agenda.

Motion to adjourn by Dockins. Seconded by Long. Motion carried 5/0.