

ST. AUGUSTINE PORT, WATERWAY & BEACH DISTRICT
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, June 20, 2017

The regular meeting of the St. Augustine Port, Waterway & Beach District was held at the St. Augustine Beach City Commission Meeting Room, 2200 A1A South, St. Augustine Beach, Florida on Tuesday, June 20, 2017.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jerry Dixon called the meeting to order at 3:07 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America followed.

3. ROLL CALL

Chairman Jerry Dixon, Commissioner Tom Rivers, Commissioner Mark Helman and Commissioner Chris Way were in attendance. Vice-Chairman Barry Benjamin was absent. The meeting was also attended by Ken Craig of Taylor Engineering, District Counsel Jim Bedsole and Secretary-Treasurer Elyse Kemper.

4. SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT

Secretary-Treasurer Kemper delivered the financial report. As of May 31, 2017, the District has spent \$6,987 on law enforcement overtime, mostly for the Sheriff's Marine Unit, \$60,000 for a fire boat for the City of St. Augustine, and an additional \$44,774 for other equipment needed by the Sheriff's Marine Unit. As of that date, the District had \$1.66 million dollars in its accounts, \$466,785 of which is committed to projects. Further, approximately \$500,000 has been advanced by the District for the Summer Haven River restoration. Under its contract with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the District is owed over one million dollars. All of the documents requested by FDEP to obtain the money were supplied over a month ago, but the payment has yet to be approved and made. Fiscal year-to-date tax revenues are \$457,486 and no additional revenue is expected.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion by Commissioner Helman to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held on May 16, 2017, was seconded by Commissioner Way and passed unanimously.

6. ENGINEERING REPORT

Ken Craig delivered the engineering report on behalf of Taylor Engineering. Mr. Craig said the Summer Haven River restoration project is almost complete. About three weeks of dredging remain and an additional two weeks of grading. He said grading remains stopped on part of the beach because of the presence of 5 least tern nests and that work will resume when the terns depart. The least tern mitigation area created off site has been very successful and has drawn dozens of nesting pairs. A contractor hired under a District contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture has successfully protected the mitigation site by destroying predators threatening birds, eggs and fledglings.

Mr. Craig also presented a letter drafted for Chairman Dixon's signature requesting the Florida Inland Navigation District to expand its beach placement area for dredge sand to include the entire berm between Summer Haven and Marineland, a distance of about one and a half miles. The current FIND placement area does not include the north end of the beach where the breach occurred in 2008. He also reported there have been requests by the Friends of Summer Haven River to impose a no-wake zone in the river when it opens. Wil Smith, Director of Parks and Recreation for St. Johns County, said an ordinance would need to be passed by the Board of County Commissioners and then a request made to FWC to impose the no-wake zone. He said there were many good reasons to have such a zone including the instability of sand banks of the newly-rebuilt river, the need to allow vegetation to re-establish there, and the possibility wakes could further damage the boat ramp at Mellon Park. Chairman Dixon said sand banks will easily erode if unprotected. Commissioner Way said Matanzas Inlet is a popular area for high-speed jet skis which would also be using the river.

Mr. Smith said the Port should send a letter to the county requesting the no-wake zone. FIND Commissioner Carl Blow said the District may have a better chance of getting such a zone if it requests a temporary no-wake zone. He said FWC is averse to approving no-wake zones because they view them as a permanent decision and that there is often litigation over the zones because of property damage from boat wakes.

Linda Ginn and Terry Parker, Friends of the Summer Haven River (FOSHR), said the inlet now attracts huge numbers of boaters, kayakers, beach-goers and fishermen, and that the river will probably receive heavy traffic when it opens. Mrs. Ginn said the Whitney Lab and local oyster growers would also support the no-wake zone.

Mr. Craig then reported St. Johns County has executed the interlocal agreement with the District allowing the county to take over the permitting process for the South Ponte Vedra-Vilano Beach beach renourishment project. He said little work remains to complete the application and requested the board to authorize Taylor to complete it.

A motion by Chairman Dixon to allow Taylor Engineering to complete the application for the South Ponte Vedra-Vilano Beach renourishment project was seconded by Commissioner Way and passed unanimously.

After the vote, Chairman Dixon said the beach along Highway A1A North which received the recent deposit of 150-200 thousand cubic yards of sand looked very good and that the project would not have occurred without the leadership of FIND Commissioner Carl Blow.

He said the entire community owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. Blow. Mr. Blow said he knew as soon as he saw the damage to Vilano Beach that any available sand would need to be directed there as soon as possible. He said every agency involved made extraordinary efforts to cooperate with his request to move the sand deposit destination from Anastasia State Park to Vilano Beach.

7. **OLD BUSINESS :**

Wil Smith appeared on behalf of St. Johns County to request the Board to provide \$50,000 for the Andy King artificial reef. The money is needed to deliver concrete to the reef site. He said the Board had committed \$50,000 in 2015 but the board's minutes failed to reflect the action. Chairman Dixon said the money was not placed in this year's budget because it could not continue to be carried forward and that the original amount approved by the board had been \$25,000 in 2015 and \$25,000 in 2016, not \$50,000 in 2015 as stated by Mr. Smith. The last money actually provided for the project was \$25,000 in 2014. Commissioner Helman said he believes the Board should support the request even though it is not in the budget.

A motion by Commissioner Helman to approve the county's request for \$50,000 for the Andy King artificial reef was seconded by Commissioner Rivers and passed unanimously.

Mr. Smith said each deposit on the reef site is reported in detail to all jurisdictional agencies and that the entire site is 40 acres. He said many large fish feed there now and that the profile of the reef reaches eleven feet in height above the sea floor. He said near-shore reefs such as Andy King are more accessible to the public and offer a better return on the investment of public funds. Delivering 1,000 tons of concrete to the reef costs about \$75,000. There are 10,000 tons of concrete in storage now on property owned by the St. Augustine Airport Authority.

In response to questions from Commissioner Helman, Jim Piggott, Director of General Services for the City of St. Augustine, reported that the contractor has begun dredging near the Dolphin Drive boat basin and will soon move to Salt Run.

Chairman Dixon said he believes a reserve fund of one million dollars is sufficient for the District's needs. Mr. Craig said the results of the survey of other coastal agencies showed huge variations in emergency reserves. Commissioner Way said a million dollars would be sufficient, in his opinion. Mr. Blow said our area has benefitted from a very good relationship with the Corps of Engineers in Jacksonville but that the staff there could change at any time and that help from the Corps may be unpredictable in the future. He added that help from FEMA is proving to be very, very slow. Recovering money from FEMA usually requires 2 years and pays a maximum of 75% of damages. He agreed that a one million dollar reserve would be adequate.

In response to questions by Commissioner Way and Chairman Dixon, Mr. Blow said the cost of a hopper dredge to clear inlet obstructions a few years ago was \$25,000 per day and that the ship is able to move relatively small amounts of material when compared to a full-size

dredge. At Commissioner Helman's request, further discussion on the reserve was tabled until the next meeting.

Chairman Dixon asked Mr. Piggott whether the opening schedule of the Bridge of Lions could be changed to allow better traffic flow. He said many bridges in south Florida are required to remain open for car traffic a half hour after a boat passes. In this way, traffic is able to clear the streets before another vessel stops traffic. Mr. Piggott said the city is attempting to eliminate some opening times during high car traffic periods. The city has also been studying how to coordinate traffic lights and signage to warn drivers away from the bridge and onto alternate routes. He said commercial tour boats operating from the City Marina also affect the schedule. Ultimately, he said, the bridge is too small to accommodate the demands from both vehicles and vessels, and that an alternate route must eventually be established.

8. NEW BUSINESS: NONE

9. GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS:

Commissioner Carl Blow, FIND, said the City of St. Augustine recently entered an agreement with FDEP to join the Guana Tolomato National Estuarine Reserve. The city refused to join when the reserve was created because of regulatory concerns. These concerns have been eliminated in the agreement by allowing the City to opt out of the reserve at any time. In response to questions by Chairman Dixon, Mr. Blow said the reserve's board meets monthly and that he attends the meetings which alternate between Guana Park and Marineland.

Mr. Blow thanked the board for supporting the artificial reef program and the St. Augustine Airport Authority for storing the large amount of concrete necessary for reef construction.

Mr. Blow said the recent placement of sand in Vilano Beach was an important victory for the community because it demonstrates efficient government. The County Commission is now sponsoring the permit to renourish Vilano Beach and South Ponte Vedra beach. He said the Corps of Engineers is now receptive to tightening the jetty on the north side of St. Augustine Inlet because it leaks a large amount of sand into the inlet. He said the District should consider authorizing Taylor Engineering to study repair options, and that FIND possibly has grants available which would help with funding. Mr. Craig clarified that the inlet structure is actually a "groin" meant to block sand flowing towards the inlet mouth. A "jetty" is meant to direct the flow of water, only.

In response to comments by Chairman Dixon, Mr. Blow said the Corps should be studying Matanzas Bay as a source of beach sand. He said the bay has gradually filled up with sand in the past two decades and that an alternate to the ebb shoal for beach sand is needed. Dredging the bay would also ensure the bay remains navigable, as much of it is now too shallow for boats.

Stuart Ormsley, South Ponte Vedra Beach Property Owners Association, suggested the board

have the data on Matanzas Bay recently collected by Naval Academy cadets analyzed to provide information about sand available in the bay. He said the County Commission has approved the creation of an MSBU for maintenance of the north beaches and is asking the State for a grant to establish an emergency reserve for these beaches.

Jim Piggott, City of St. Augustine, said the city will be receiving a ten thousand dollar grant from FIND to install shoal markers south of the City Marina. The dredge contractor is now working near the Dolphin Drive boat basin and will soon move to Salt Run. The contractor will also collect the remaining storm debris from Salt Run. In response to questions by Commissioner Helman, Mr. Piggott said FWC has not finalized its recommendation for a harbor management statute, and that he hopes it will give local governments latitude to enact ordinances on their own. He said the Lighthouse Pier was damaged by Hurricane Matthew much more than expected, and that the City Marina's breakwater had saved the marina from much more serious damage.

Carlos Aviles, City of St. Augustine Fire Chief, said the city has received the new fire boat and that it will be fully in service within a few weeks. Fire Department crew have been training for several weeks and have been working with other agencies on the use of the boat. There will be a ceremony soon to bless the boat and officially place it in service.

Corporal Josh Underwood, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, reported that officers spent 140 hours on the water last month and responded to 77 calls for service, conducted 9 inspections, issued 8 warnings and discovered yet another derelict vessel from the hurricane. The new jet dock has been installed at the City Marina and allows a boat to be launched in just two minutes.

Wil Smith, Director of Parks and Recreation for St. Johns County, said the County Commission recently set aside \$600,000 for dredging boat ramps and is studying the possibility of adding another ramp on the west side of the Palm Valley Bridge. He said dredging will begin soon at Crane Park and Butler Park. He added that many local governments are concerned about the expansion of the homestead exemption and the negative effect on tax revenues. The county is considering the imposition of launch fees at boat ramps and user fees for other services in order to meet the projected shortfall in revenue. He suggested the District consider expanding its boundaries as people from all over the county enjoy the use of public amenities provided in part by the District. Mr. Blow said expanding the homestead tax exemption may cause a drop in tax revenues by as much as 8 percent.

Lt. Steve Zukowski, FWC, reported that new no-wake buoys and bridge signage will be installed during the month of August and will allow better enforcement of no-wake zones. He said boat wake damage is very common and leads to many complaints to FWC. In response to questions by Chairman Dixon, Lt. Zukowski said getting a no-wake designation for the Summer Haven River would be difficult because it would require the county to pass an ordinance and then ask FWC to approve and adopt the zone. He said the process is full of delays and usually takes a year or more.

Ellis Zahra, Friends of the Summer Haven River, said about six weeks of work remains in the restoration project. He said additional restoration funds may be available from FEMA

and FIND because of the breach caused by Hurricane Matthew. Chairman Dixon questioned whether oysters would naturally move into the restored river. Linda Ginn, FOSHR, said local oyster growers have been working the Whitney Lab to plan re-seeding historic oyster beds as well as replacing sea oats and other vegetation.

Carl Blow said a temporary no-wake zone may be easier to get than a permanent regulatory zone. He said a request for a temporary zone should be made directly to FWC and county commissioners because their staffs are reluctant to support new regulatory zones as a result of frequent challenges by the boating industry. Mr. Craig said he will draft a letter for Chairman Dixon's signature.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE

11. COMMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS: NONE

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Dixon announced the next meeting of the board will be held at 3:00 p.m. on July 18, 2017 in the St. Augustine Beach City Commission Room.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business, Chairman Dixon adjourned the meeting at 5:25 p.m.

Secretary-Treasurer

Chairman

wk/rg/port/minutes-2017/Minutes 6-20-17 meeting