

ST. AUGUSTINE PORT, WATERWAY & BEACH DISTRICT

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, May 17, 2011

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, May 17, 2011.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jerry Dixon called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

ROLL CALL

Chairman Jerry Dixon, Commissioners Barry Benjamin, Tom Rivers, Jay Bliss and Herb Rippe were in attendance. The meeting was also attended by: Elyse Kemper, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, District Attorney James Bedsole, and Dr. Steve Schropp of Taylor Engineering.

SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT

Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, Elyse Kemper, delivered the Treasurer's report. Funds available as of April 30, 2011 total \$1,923,916.00, less committed funds of \$204,308.00 and Florida Board of Administration Fund B, \$46,241.00, leaving net available funds of \$1,673,367.00. Taxes received to date for the 2010-2011 tax year total \$358,500 with \$41,216 still expected. Net funds available as of May 11, 2011 total \$1,553,841.00.

Commissioner Rippe commented he was concerned about the effect of the large amount of committed funds and the fact the District is spending and will spend much more this year than its income. Chairman Dixon responded that the funds available include money saved for future projects and that the District should not appear to hoard cash or the voters may call for a tax cut.

Commissioner Rippe reiterated he believes the Board needs to consider parameters on spending and would like to discuss it in more detail at a future meeting. Commissioner Bliss voiced his agreement.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion by Commissioner Rivers, seconded by Commissioner Benjamin, to approve the minutes for the meeting of April 19, 2011, as presented, was unanimously passed.

ENGINEERING REPORT

Dr. Steve Schropp delivered the engineering report on behalf of Taylor Engineering. He said the permits for dredging the San Sebastian River are valid for five years. He said he met with representatives of FDEP and members of the Summer Haven community on April 28, 2011. FDEP indicated general support for restoration of the Summer Haven River and that the sand deposited there is presumably beach-quality. He also met with NERR representatives who voiced support for the restoration.

The next step in the restoration plan is to obtain core borings to verify the nature of the deposited material and how it interfaces with the underlying material. Borings would enable a precise calculation of how much material could be removed. Dredging costs are now approximately \$8-\$12 per cubic yard for sand. The borings will cost approximately \$25,000.00.

Commissioner Benjamin asked what would occur after borings. Dr. Schropp said the next step would be a detailed design study to determine the extent of the project. This would involve talking to all affected agencies and communities and planning the actual extent of the work. The final price would depend on how much material is moved. For example, a large project of 250,000 cubic yards could cost up to three million dollars.

Chairman Dixon asked whether the project could be drawn out over time. Dr. Schropp said it is not necessary to do everything allowed by a permit but that care must be taken because changing the project in a material respect by reducing its size may lead to regulatory complications.

Commissioner Rippe asked how much it will cost to go completely through the permitting process. Dr. Schropp said the cost of fully designing and permitting the restoration with all the geo-technical data needed may cost an additional \$100,000. Dr. Srinivas said the figure may be closer to \$150,000. Dr. Schropp said the rule of thumb for permitting is 10-20% of the estimated project cost.

Commissioner Rippe asked if Taylor Engineering was requesting another \$150,000.00 for a permit. Commissioner Dixon said there is no way to get contributions for the project if there is no permit. He added the County should sponsor the project but the County has no funding for it.

Commissioner Bliss asked to hear from the Summer Haven community and Linda Ginn rose to speak. Ms. Ginn said soil borings will help determine whether and how the sand will be replaced on the beach and that those factors will help determine the overall cost.

In response to a question by Commissioner Bliss, Ms. Ginn said neither FDEP nor NERR have offered any financial assistance. Commissioner Benjamin and Chairman Dixon said they supported going ahead with soil borings but continuing with the design work will require involvement of the County or some other sponsor agency. Commissioner Rippe said he is supportive but wants to see more definition of the scope of the entire project.

Commissioner Benjamin suggested Ms. Ginn ask the County or her community for help. Commissioner Dixon said funds needed to be committed prior to starting or the project may fail to be completed.

Dr. Schropp said the project is basically the removal of sand with project cost based mostly on the amount of sand removed or relocated. Commissioner Bliss asked if significant time would be saved by authorizing borings now instead of waiting for a precise cost? Dr. Schropp said perhaps two weeks would be saved. Commissioner Benjamin said more sand was being deposited every day and that delays drive up the cost.

Kathy McKenna of 255 Barrataria Drive said she was concerned about getting help for the Summer Haven community because their taxes have been based on assessments for their waterfront property, much of which is no longer on water.

Chairman Dixon commented that the County, FDEP and NERR all support the Board's efforts but that none of those agencies have offered any financial assistance. He said doing the project piecemeal is not possible and that economically, the County will need to get on-board with it.

Commissioner Benjamin made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Bliss, to approve the expenditure of up to \$25,000.00 to pay for the collection of geo-technical data in the form of core borings as described by Dr. Schropp. The motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to come before the Board.

NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Dixon reported FDEP has issued its notice of intent to issue a permit for inlet dredging and that a group of property owners had asked for extra time to file an objection to the permit. After that, the Director of FDEP personally met with all the parties in an attempt to avoid any objections. Joe Stephenson, Director of Public Works for St. Johns County, said the meetings were very helpful and that a compromise had been reached which should allow dredging to begin. The elements of the compromise are that a limit of 1.8 million cubic yards of sand may be removed from the south side of the ebb shoal, that the County must conduct erosion monitoring on the north beaches and finally, that the District must agree to update the Inlet Management Plan.

The Board then discussed the probable cost of updating the IMP. Dr. Srinivas said the original plan in 1994 cost \$300,000.00 and that ACOE had just spent one year and a million dollars studying the inlet. Mr. Stephenson said the compromise was supported by ACOE and that it called for a commitment from the Board, not necessarily any expenditure at this time. He suggested the Board vote to begin the update process within a time certain and that it provide notice of its vote to the County. Dr. Srinivas said the original plan took two (2) years to complete.

Commissioner Benjamin moved to begin the process of updating the IMP within 90 days. His motion was seconded by Chairman Dixon. On a roll call vote, the Board unanimously passed the motion to update the IMP as stated by Commissioner Benjamin.

In response to a question by Commissioner Bliss, Mr. Stephenson said the project is set to begin in November, 2011 with active dredging beginning in early 2012.

Commissioner Bliss introduced Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Steve McDonald, U.S. Coast Guard, who discussed how the Coast Guard maintains the buoys in St. Augustine Inlet. He said the Coast Guard responds mainly to reported discrepancies when conditions allow their buoy tenders to operate. He said the navigation aids in our inlet are classified as "MPP", most probable position. This means the markers are moved to approximate the useable channel. He also referred to St. Augustine Inlet as "federally marked" but not "federally maintained". He reported Buoy No. 5 was missing from the inlet and had been replaced. Commissioner Rippe asked what was meant by "federally marked" but CWO McDonald declined to explain. CWO McDonald said Coast Guard commanders look at a discrepancy report every day and that the reports are available on-line. CWO McDonald said there are four vessels to maintain 3,000 buoys on the southeast coast of the United States. Commissioner Bliss thanked CWO McDonald for addressing the Board and re-setting the buoys in the inlet.

Commissioner Bliss then introduced James Coates of Towboat US. Mr. Coates said that areas of the inlet channel have as little as five (5) feet of water at mean low tide. He said Towboat US gets calls daily for advice on how to navigate the inlet and that the recent grounding of a transient vessel was due to failure of the crew notice temporary buoys.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Officer Mike Pedonti, FWC, reported Commissioner Bliss informed him of an untended vessel near Comanche Cove which the Coast Guard had removed to a safe location. He said a list of out-of-date registrations furnished to the Tax Collector has resulted in more current registration decals appearing on local vessels. He said the State Attorney is beginning to follow up on derelict boats whose owners can be identified. This offers the possibility of restitution for removal costs.

Officer Pedonti said the recent grounding in the inlet was caused by operator error and failure to follow the markers around a shoal in the inlet. He said St. Augustine Inlet is not that difficult to traverse if good mariner skills are employed.

COMMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Dixon asked why the public oyster bed in Salt Run was not marked. He also said the channel exit at the Vilano Boat Ramp needs markers. Officer Pedonti said the Florida Department of Agriculture used to mark the beds but no longer does so. Officer Zukowski said the problem at the Vilano Ramp is the shoal present directly off the east end of the channel. Boaters must exit north or south but cannot go directly east at any but the highest tides.

Commissioner Bliss then discussed the vote to spend District funds to dredge Porpoise Point. He moved to reverse the vote but no commissioner seconded the motion.

Commissioner Rippe said the agreement to dredge the inlet is an unusual and beneficial alliance to get the work done. He said the money is worth it because the ACOE and the County are on board with the plan to dredge the entire channel, not just Porpoise Point. Chairman Dixon said the District's contribution created interest in the other agencies and made it all possible. Dr. Srinivas added that all of the sand will go to benefit St. Augustine Beach.

NEXT MEETING

The Chairman announced the next regular meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, June 21, 2011, at 3:00 p.m. in the same location.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business, Chairman Dixon adjourned the meeting at 5:50 p.m.

Secretary-Treasurer

Chairman