

**ST. AUGUSTINE PORT, WATERWAY & BEACH DISTRICT**

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING**

**Tuesday, July 17, 2012**

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, July 17, 2012.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Jerry Dixon called the meeting to order at 3:00 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 Herb Rippe, Jay Bliss and Barry Benjamin, were in attendance. The meeting was also attended by District Counsel Jim Bedsole, Dr. Rajesh Srinivas of Taylor Engineering and Secretary-Treasurer Elyse Kemper.

**SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT**

Secretary-Treasurer Elyse Kemper delivered the treasurer's report and began by detailing funds committed and funds actually spent in the fiscal year to date. Of \$380,165 budgeted, \$315,878 has been spent, including \$23,700 to St. Johns Fire and Rescue for the purchase of jet skis and related equipment, which was taken from reserves. She explained that most of the District's reserve funds had been transferred to BB&T Bank and that net available funds total \$1,639,555. Tax revenues of \$366,900 have been collected to date with a further \$1,265 expected.

Commissioner Rippe asked if the column labeled "spent" appearing in the Treasurer's report is actually all the District has spent this year. Ms. Kemper confirmed this was correct.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Bedsole said the minutes for the June, 2012 regular meeting were not complete and that they would be available for review before the next regular meeting.

## **ENGINEERING REPORT**

Dr. Rajesh Srinivas presented the report on behalf of Taylor Engineering. He said bathymetric surveys will be completed of Salt Run before and after the FIND dredging project in the Intracoastal Waterway to verify that no sediment has been lost or released during the pumping to the beach. He said the surveys may be sufficient to get a good look at the bottom of Salt Run. He also confirmed the Army Corps of Engineers is now surveying the depth of the navigation channel in St. Augustine Inlet and that the survey may be complete as early as next week.

Commissioner Rippe said he had recently visited the area around buoy 5A and that it was about 15 feet deep. The County Engineers told him the bottom there appeared to be shell and not beach quality sand, so dredging had been halted. Also, the area has collapsed since it was first dredged and the contractor has agreed to dredge there a second time. One million four hundred thousand cubic yards of sand have been extracted from the inlet and the project will now move to the ebb shoal for an additional seven hundred thousand cubic yards.

Commissioner Rippe said the County had previously committed to take sand from the inlet rather than the ebb shoal and that then-County Commission Chairman Bryan had written a letter to that effect. Chairman Dixon said the dredgers will stop if they hit coquina or some other unsuitable material, and move to the next available source for beach quality sand.

In conclusion, Dr. Srinivas said FDEP is still doing an internal review of its new Inlet Management Plan and that FDEP intends to bring it to the Commission for review as soon as it is completed. Also, the permit application for the Summer Haven River restoration is complete and should be submitted to FDEP this week.

## **OLD BUSINESS - NONE**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. TRIM - Set Millage Rate**

Secretary-Treasurer Elyse Kemper presented two alternative budget projections. The first is based on the use of the “roll-back” rate of taxation intended to approximate the prior year’s revenues. The second projection used the prior year’s actual tax rate which, due to the decline in property values, produces less revenue than the prior year. She advised that using the roll-back rate has the advantage of conserving steady (not increased) revenue and is not considered an increase according to TRIM laws.

Commissioner Rippe said the roll-back rate is an increase in millage over last year’s and is actually a higher tax rate, although it brings in the same amount of revenue. Commissioner

Benjamin said the tax rate had not changed in years and that he was in favor of using the roll-back rate. Commissioner Bliss agreed the roll-back rate was the best option. Commissioner Rippe said most other local agencies are keeping last year's rates. Commissioner Bliss said he believes the District should be able to tax the entire county, like FIND.

**A motion by Chairman Dixon to approve the roll-back rate for publication was seconded by Commissioner Benjamin and passed with Commissioner Rippe voting against.**

**B. Special Projects Budget 2012-2013.**

Commissioner Rippe opened discussion of the budget for the 2012-2013 fiscal year by distributing a worksheet totaling the special projects he believes may be undertaken in the coming year. According to his total, the projects could put the District in a deficit for the year by spending more than tax revenue would provide. He said his point was that the Commission has no process in place for analyzing the spending proposals presented to it. Too often, parties seeking funding simply appear at meetings unannounced and Commissioners are forced to decide without adequate deliberation. Chairman Dixon responded that the Commission usually decides to commit funds and then later spends the money, so there is time for consideration.

In response to questions by Commissioners Benjamin and Bliss, Ms. Kemper said the special projects fund is composed of tax revenues which remain after the District's operating expenses are paid. Commissioner Bliss said thirty percent of the District budget is operating expenses. Commissioner Benjamin said there was nothing which could be cut out of the operating expenses. Commissioner Dixon said the District operates without staff and is able to save money because of that fact. Ms. Kemper said the dredging projects such as the San Sebastian River and Salt Run do not occur every year so they have historically been paid from reserves rather than annual tax revenues.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Lt. Steve Zukowski, FWC, reported that one of the sailboats anchored near Crane Park was in danger of becoming derelict because it appears to be unattended and is resting on the bottom at low tide. He said activity around County boat ramps has been brisk but safe. Matanzas Inlet is now silted in to the extent vessel traffic is quite restricted.

Sgt. Jay Bucher, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office Marine Unit, reported intense boating activity the weekend prior to July 4 and very few vessels out for the Wednesday fireworks in the bay. Commissioner Dixon said County officials had asked him to meet with them to discuss the number of boats which are anchored out of the city limits and may become derelict.

Brendan Burke, Lighthouse Museum, requested funding for an event to remove abandoned crab traps from local waters. He provided a budget detailing about \$13,000 in costs and asked for money from the Commissioners. Lt. Zukowski said the project would clean up "ghost traps" which may be harming the local fish and crab population and creating eyesores. A discussion ensued among the Commissioners which ended with a consensus that the

project was good, that other agencies and organizations should be providing support for it, and that the District could not fund food, drinks or entertainment.

**A motion by Commissioner Rippe to donate \$3,000.00 to the event was seconded by Commissioner Bliss and passed with Commissioner Benjamin voting against.**

Roy Jaeger appeared on behalf of the St. Augustine Maritime Foundation to talk about his organization's plans for maritime education and the operation of water taxis for the St. Augustine area. His organization is also building a replica Spanish boat. He requested \$5,000.00 to help with the boat construction.

Commissioner Rippe said he was supportive of Mr. Jaeger's organization but the district was limited to making improvements to local waters. Commissioner Dixon told Mr. Jaeger the District could not fund educational projects or private enterprise or improvements to private property and that funds were very limited for all projects this year. Commissioner Bliss said the commission should be able to spend its tax revenue at its own discretion, pursuant to Florida Attorney General Opinion 2009-27 which states, in part, that Commissioners are charged with making the ultimate determination of whether any expenditure satisfies a lawful District purpose.

#### **COMMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Benjamin said the Commission should exercise greater care in decisions to fund projects of other organizations. He said the Commissioners are often the object of emotional appeals and have little time to consider requests when no process is in place to screen such items.

Commissioner Rippe said the District should prioritize its funding decisions to avoid depleting its reserves. Chairman Dixon said the reserves eventually are spent on the very large projects such as inlet dredging and that it is a justifiable and reasonable use of District funds. Commissioner Benjamin said dredging is part of the reason the District exists. Commissioner Bliss said the Commission should find ways to spend the money the District receives in taxes and that it was their duty to do so.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

The Chairman announced the next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 11, 2012, at 5:05 p.m. in the same location.

#### **ADJOURN:**

There being no further business, Chairman Dixon adjourned the meeting at \_\_\_\_\_ p.m.

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Secretary-Treasurer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman

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