



Jacksonville Waterways Commission Lynette Self, Chair

The monthly meeting of the Jacksonville Waterways Commission was called to order Thursday, March 2, 2006, in the City Council Chamber, by the Chair, Council Member Lynette Self.

The minutes for the February 2, 2006 meeting were approved.

Ron Barton, Executive Director, Jacksonville Economic Development Commission, made a PowerPoint presentation on the JEDC's Design Review Committee and the Mayor's Downtown Visions. The presentation emanated in the aftermath of a discussion at a previous Waterways Commission meeting that looked at waterfront projects and how those projects impact our waterways. Mr. Barton noted that the river is the quintessential part of our downtown; that the river is the driver of our downtown economic development and redevelopment; that we must embrace the river and use it as a part of our strategy, recognizing it as an amenity and attraction for capital investment.

In putting the Jacksonville Landing in the context of the discussion, Mr. Barton discussed the City's specific legal obligation associated with the Landing. The City has a legal obligation that is a twenty-year ongoing default related to parking and the City is grappling with the problem. The issue is a complicated one. The reason why the Landing issue gets mixed in with the visionary process for downtown is the fact that when the administration tried to negotiate a solution to the parking default issue, it led to a very specific development concept. The draft proposal coming out of the negotiations called for the closing of Hogan Street, a view corridor to the river; the placement of a parking garage on the waterfront; height elements in excess of downtown overlay requirements; and the draft required the selling of publicly-owned land beneath the Landing to a private developer. While the parking default issue was addressed and resolved by the draft proposal, there were other components that violated many of the things that the City felt were important elements of the City's downtown master plan. The central themes for downtown development remain: view corridors; public access to the river; the Riverwalk; the public policy of retaining publicly owned land in public ownership. Mr. Barton noted that there are some basic premises that we should embrace when looking at downtown projects and improvements. Those premises include preserving and enhancing view corridors to the river; creating better and more usable public space; and encouraging pedestrian activity. On the latter, Mr. Barton observed that our downtown efforts are going to succeed or fail primarily on the basis of its being a pedestrian experience. All great urban downtowns are built around a pedestrian experience. We have to connect the Northbank and Southbank. We have a unique situation where our downtown is divided but there are great opportunities via the Main Street Bridge, water taxis and other things to connect the two. In addition, we

have to have a strategic and comprehensive approach to downtown parking. We need to move away from the vintage '60s and '70s transportation mindset that had getting people downtown to work and out of downtown as quickly as possible. This is counterintuitive to what we want a downtown, pedestrian experience to be. We will be successful with downtown to the extent that we engage private development and private investments. We want more cohesion with downtown projects and we want to be consistent with our downtown master plan. More creative uses of the Main Street Bridge, Friendship Fountain and Kids Kampus (moving it to the Southbank) are simple things, at the core of downtown, that enhance the attractiveness of downtown. Our vision for changing downtown entails more than the Landing. We have to have a holistic approach to an overall vision for downtown. We have to connect the projects that we envision with funding sources.

Council Member Graham asked Mr. Barton what are we hearing from major proposed downtown developments/developers (e.g., Kuhn). In response, Mr. Barton said that the developers were excited and that the feedback from the private sector regarding capital projects was positive. The developers are aware of the risks, potential pitfalls and financial complexities.

Council Member Self said that boating access must not be left out of the development equation. We must be sure that boating access is a component of the master plan and development. Mr. Barton replied that he would be back before the Waterways Commission with a presentation on the aggregate of marina slips that are expected to materialize with proposed development projects.

Commissioner Bailey remarked on the major developments and progress that have ensued over the last ten years beginning with the River City Renaissance and continuing on through the Better Jacksonville Plan. There have been numerous, positive steps.

Commissioner Lamb raised the security issue with boating. In the Starry Nights programs at Metropolitan Park, security was present and as a result there were many boats at the event. Presently, there is no security presence at The Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts functions and there are few boaters on hand.

BOSN Dave Foley, United States Coast Guard, gave a presentation on a Waterways Analysis Management System (WAMS) Study currently underway. Commissioner Grey had brought the study to the Commission's attention at a previous Waterways Commission meeting. The WAMS study is looking at the St. Johns River from the river's mouth to the Fuller Warren Bridge; the river's tributaries and the Intracoastal Waterway; Army Corps of Engineer-approved projects; and regulated zones. The study is done to validate the funding that is committed to projects and to determine how reduced funding from Washington will impact Jacksonville's waterways.

In a PowerPoint presentation, Commissioner Gary Anderson gave a presentation on lessons learned from Katrina damage in New Orleans. After sharing his experiences from his extensive stay in New Orleans in the aftermath of the storm, Commissioner Anderson observed that a key lesson learned from Katrina was the importance of being

prepared for a major storm; New Orleans was not. Other lessons included the value of using engineering expertise rather than patronage and that in rescue and recovery undertakings, all segments of society should be served.

Commissioner Anderson said that we should rethink land use on the Gulf Coast.

On proposed Federal/State Manatee Rules, Greg Radlinski, Office of General Counsel, informed the Commission that rules are about to be published in the *Federal Register*. The Jacksonville Waterways Commission has been designated as the Local Rule Review Committee and is expected to review the proposed, new rules. Two public hearings are to be held. The next public hearing is scheduled for April. The JWW, in its capacity as the Local Rule Review Committee, has sixty (60) days to submit a written report. The report is expected to be a compilation of scientific data, public input and public testimony. The Local Rule Review Committee is to make recommendations to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in Tallahassee. The Chair, C/M Self, announced that at the next (April) meeting of the Waterways Commission, our #1 item on the agenda will be a public testimony and comment component to ascertain and acquire viewpoints and information to incorporate in the report to Tallahassee.

In the monthly Manatee Update, Dr. White reported that the last aerial surveys were on February 15th and February 17th and that one manatee was sighted in the Intracoastal Waterway near the Atlantic Avenue Bridge. We are consistently seeing over 3,100 manatees annually. We have had increasingly reported public sightings. One manatee fatality was reported on February 14th, the cause undetermined.

Dan Cronrath, Recreation Planner, Parks, Recreation, Conservation and Entertainment Department, provided the Commission with a FIND Project Report. A list of FIND projects was distributed and discussed. The total FIND request for projects is \$1,445,306.00. In response to a question, November 6th is the earliest that we can begin to dredge Goodby's Creek, if FIND approves the funding. Dr. White urged that the dredging be done during the winter months when no manatees are around. The Chair, C/M Self, raised a question about a Sister's Creek project. Is it wise to build a ramp there in view of the strong currents? C/M Self said that she would talk with those who canoe and kayak in the area about the feasibility of a ramp and report back to the Commission.

In Old Business, the resolution imploring the Governor to provide funding for projects to clean up the river passed as an emergency.

In New Business, C/M Copeland discussed House Bill 955, legislation addressing the issue of the loss of public access marinas. HB 955 has incentives for marinas' efforts to maintain public access. Proposals in Pinellas County to provide incentives to marinas were cited. This is an issue that C/M Copeland feels the Commission should address immediately, particularly in view of a proposed development project at Julington Creek. Commissioner Pitman announced that she would call a meeting of the Blue-Belting Subcommittee that she heads.

The next meeting of the Jacksonville Waterways Commission is scheduled for Thursday, April 6, 2006.

John J. Jackson, City Council Research Division, (904) 630-1729