



## **Jacksonville Waterways Commission Lynette Self, Chair**

The monthly meeting of the Jacksonville Waterways Commission was called to order on Thursday morning, September 7, 2006, in the City Council Chambers by the Commission's Chair, Council Member Lynette Self.

Lack of a quorum delayed approval of the Commission minutes for the August 3, 2006 meeting.

Dr. Quinton White, Jacksonville University, discussed the Duval County Manatee Protection Plan Permitting Process Revisions. According to Dr. White, the matter had been discussed for a year. The aim was to put together a second edition of the Manatee Protection Plan (MPP). Dr. Pinto was credited with having done a considerable amount of the leg work in updating the document. Commissioners had been provided copies for their review. Numerous clarifications in definitions (i.e., marinas) and changes in the names of agencies have been made for the updated edition. The current document is a compilation of many of the changes made over the past five years. There were no substantial changes. The changes are already reflected in the Comprehensive Plan. Dr. White indicated that he is hopeful that the Commission will be prepared and able to vote on the changes at the next Commission meeting.

Senator King indicated that he had been in touch with the personal watercraft industry association regarding their willingness to donate watercraft to an agency in Duval County, an issue that had been raised at the last Commission meeting, but had forgot what agency. The Chair said that it was the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office that was interested in acquiring donated personal watercraft and Sgt. Suber confirmed that.

The Commission next heard a status update from Plans & Permits on the Duval County Artificial Reef Plan by Jody McDaniel, Planning & Grants Coordinator, Parks, Recreation, Entertainment & Conservation Department. The Chair had asked Ms. McDaniel to review where we were

with artificial reefs, how they were being utilized, how we were monitoring the artificial reefs that we have and perhaps exploring new sites. Ms. McDaniel's PowerPoint program was: Status of the Artificial Reef Program, that entailed an update on the program and the renewal of the permits.

In December 2004, the City re-applied to the Army Corps of Engineers to renew permits for twenty-five (25) sites. In January 2005, Ms. McDaniel began researching other counties' artificial reef programs, meeting with off-shore fishing clubs, Fish & Wildlife and others. In July 2005, we received the first Request for Information from the Army Corps. The Corps had some concerns about our coordinates for sites. To eliminate confusion on the coordinates, Ms. McDaniels worked with the City's marine biologist, Dana Morton, to convert all of the coordinates to the format acceptable to the Corps. A GIS layer was then created that enabled us to present a map with all of the reef sites to the Corps along with the permit. In continued work on the process, Ms. McDaniel and Steve Nichols met with numerous people. Fish & Wildlife had expressed its concern that the artificial reef program should be overseen by a qualified individual.

The Army Corps of Engineers felt that the maps were too difficult to read and requested additional information on specific sites. Individual maps were created for each site. Information in the maps for the specific sites included distance from the jetties and reef depth. In December 2005, a draft of an artificial reef plan was prepared and sent to various individuals for comments.

In July 2006, the Corps requested additional information. This request came from the National Marine Fisheries Division. They were requesting new port access routes for the North Atlantic Right Whale. They are requesting more specific information including the depth, how high they protrude from the seabed, etc. The Corps made clear that if there are little or no reefs in the sites of the new routes over some of our permit areas, they do not want those sites permitted.

We may not have twenty-five (25) sites re-permitted.

Recognizing the value of an artificial reef program and the amount of time that it will take to get up and running, the Parks, Recreation, Entertainment & Conservation Administration directed Ms. McDaniel to contact consultants to get a proposal to complete the permitting process and finalize the artificial reef plan. They are hoping to hire a consultant within

the next week. We are also determining how to best oversee and monitor the program and, if possible, hire a qualified consulting firm to administer deployments and monitor the reefs.

A GIS map with coordinates, the depths and other information about the reef sites will be accessible to the public on the City's website.

Based on past Army Corps of Engineers timeframes and if everything goes according to plan, the City should have the artificial reef plan up and running by March 2007. This would be a win-win situation for everyone.

Commissioner Lowe asked that if funding was not an issue, that if they can sink an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Pensacola and a destroyer in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Fort Lauderdale, why can't we deposit concrete blocks off the coast of Jacksonville? Why the obstacles? Ms. McDaniel replied that we have to renew our permit because a moratorium on our off-shore artificial reef program had been imposed back in 2000 (and our permits with the Army Corps of Engineers had subsequently expired) and that we were now in the process of acquiring new permits.

Dr. White said that one of the observations that had emerged from the work on getting the artificial reef program underway was the need for oversight and a public hearing format for any kind of deployment and that the proposal had been made that the Waterways Commission be that body. Dr. White commented on why artificial reefs in Northeast Florida are extremely important to recreational fishing. We would not have the recreational fishing component in our economy today if it were not for the artificial reefs developed years ago. The natural bottoms of our off-shore are largely sand, referred to as "dead bottom" in biological terms. Research indicates that there are over 100 businesses in Duval County that cater to recreational fishing and that the fishing industry here has a multi-million dollar economic impact. Every other year, an economic impact analysis is done for the annual Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament. The findings show that consistently there is an \$11-14 million economic boost from that tournament. Fishing in Northeast Florida is a \$50 million dollar component of the economic puzzle here. The moratorium on the artificial reef program is negative.

Senator King asked what were the consequences if permits for the County's

twenty-five artificial reefs were denied. Ms. McDaniels said that from her understanding, failure to acquire certification would mean that no further deployment of artificial reefs in the area would be allowed. In denying the permits, the concern would be the protection of the North Atlantic Right Whale; their migratory paths and shipping lanes.

Dr. Gerard Pinto, JU, provided the Commission with the Manatee Update. On the last aerial flight, 56 manatees were sighted, mostly south of the Buckman Bridge. There have been ten deaths, to date, this year, five of which were watercraft related fatalities. A lot of algae bloom was seen in the Julington Creek area. Dr. White observed that there is less bloom this year because there has been more rain and the temperatures have not been as high as the previous year's.

Dr. White reported that Goodby's and Mandarin boat ramps are getting pretty good use. Over the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, over 50 boat trailers were counted at Goodby's and over 30 during the Labor Day holiday weekend. People by and large have been observing the idle speed limit, though he suggested that more education was needed. People at Goodby's are anxious for the dredging project to get underway. Since the boat ramp's opening, auto traffic has not increased dramatically.

Sgt. Suber reported on a meeting that Council Member Copeland and City officials had at the Mandarin boat ramp. As a result of dredging, the depth at the ramp was reported as good. The floating docks needed to be extended (tripled in length). The current, original docks are not boater friendly. Floating docks and additional pilings will remedy that situation.

On a voice vote, the Commission unanimously voted to recommend approval of the resolution drafted by Assistant General Greg Radlinski that supports efforts to restore the Lower St. Johns River.

On pending legislation, the Commission voted to recommend **approval** of **Ordinance 2006-949**, amending the Ordinance Code to change manatee protection motorboat speed zones from Yr-Round to Seasonal.

John Pappas, Chief, Engineering Division, Public Works Department gave the Commission an update and report on signage in the Ortega River. The City inspected the area the previous day and identified several ways to add additional lighted markers. With the additional markers, we will have a

more defined and identifiable channel. Four unlighted markers will be added.

Kelley Boree, Deputy Director, Parks, Recreation, Entertainment & Conservation Department, updated the Commission on the Metropolitan Park dredge project. Four slips are too shallow to be utilized. The process of survey, design and permitting is underway. This will be a lengthy process. The dredging will not be completed by football season. Commissioner Grey said that a culvert was the cause of the silting and that if the culvert was not fixed; the problem will not be alleviated. Senator King indicated that he wants to help to get the State's assistance in expediting the permitting process for the dredge and maintenance at Metro Park.

Commissioner Anderson's resignation from the Commission was announced. Former Waterways Coordinator and Dockmaster Steve Nichols has been nominated to replace Commissioner Anderson on the Commission and is awaiting City Council confirmation.

The next scheduled meeting of the Jacksonville Waterways Commission is Thursday, October 5, 2006.

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