



## **Jacksonville Waterways Commission Bill Bishop, Chair**

The monthly meeting of the Jacksonville Waterways Commission was called to order on Thursday, June 7, 2007, in the City Council Chambers, by the Chair, Council Member Lynette Self.

The minutes for the May 3, 2007 meeting were approved.

The Chair acknowledged the presence of Council President Michael Corrigan.

Ken Venables, General Services Director, City of Palatka, made a presentation on St. Johns River Water Transit Service. Palatka is in the process of applying for a grant to explore the possibility and potential of a water taxi service between Palatka, Green Cove Springs and Jacksonville and had asked communities along the St. Johns River for letters of support for the concept of a water taxi service. Several Waterways Commissioners had raised questions about the project at the previous Waterways Commission meeting. Mr. Venables was invited to address the issue and to answer questions. The Chair, Council Member Self, asked Mr. Venables to explain what Palatka proposes to do, how it would impact Duval County and where the money needed would come from.

Mr. Venables explained that in 2002, Palatka received a grant from the federal government with the assistance of United States Representatives Corrine Brown and Bill Mica to develop a water taxi service from Palatka south, to Welaka and Crescent City on the St. Johns River. Palatka consulted with Atlas Hovercraft in Green Cove Springs and that firm's executive, Mr. Peterson. Atlas built hovercraft. The firm advised Palatka that hovercraft were environmentally and manatee friendly, that hovercraft did an excellent job in transporting people and vehicles on the river at approximately 60 miles per hour.

It was clear that a water taxi service would not be a Palatka issue per se but a regional issue. Palatka is now considered a suburb of Jacksonville (with the widening of Highway 207 in Putnam and St. Johns Counties). People who are moving to Putnam and St. Johns Counties work in downtown Jacksonville. A water transit working group was established. Mike Blaylock and Mike Miller of the Jacksonville Transit Authority and others (Council Member Elaine Brown being one) attended the meetings. Everyone felt that the potential for scheduled water taxi service from Palatka to Jacksonville was an exciting idea. Orange Park and Green Cove Springs had actually already selected their hover port locations.

A grant requesting \$3,000,000 was submitted to Congresswoman Brown's office to purchase a hovercraft. There has not been a response to the grant request yet. All of the

communities along the St. Johns River from Flagler County to Jacksonville were asked for letters expressing support for the concept of the project. That is how the request for a resolution of support came to the Jacksonville City Council; to demonstrate to Congresswoman Brown that there is support for the concept of a water taxi service.

Commissioner Bailey said that he supported the concept 100%. He suggested that the Florida East Coast Railroad be included in the working group because the railroad bridge could be an obstacle. Greg Radlinski, Office of General Counsel, wondered whether or not the working group had contacted the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission because in running a vessel up the St. Johns River at 60 m.p.h., you are going to run into slow speed zones for manatee protection and it is doubtful that there are exemptions for hovercraft, however manatee friendly they are supposed to be. Commissioner Pitman suggested that the historical societies of the communities along the river be consulted for an historic perspective because there had previously been river transportation by steam and riverboats.

A motion was made and approved to recommend that the City Council approve a resolution expressing support for Palatka's efforts to secure a grant for water taxi service on the river.

The Chair recognized Council President Corrigan who thanked the Commission for its work. The President particularly recognized and thanked Council Member Copeland who was leaving the Council and honored Council Member Self who had been Chair of the Commission for seven of the eight years of her tenure on the Council. The President presented Council Member Self with a plaque.

In the monthly Manatee Update, Dr. Quenton White announced that we are now sharing news on manatee reports and data with First Coast News and that the information is being broadcast as part of a public awareness program. This year, we saw record high numbers of manatees early in the year (171). On May 21<sup>st</sup>, Dr. Gerard Pinto flew an aerial and saw 116 manatees, 93 in the St. Johns River, 120 in the Intra Coastal. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, visibility was low but 69 manatees were sighted, 56 in the river, 13 in the Intra Coastal. There had been 5 total manatee deaths this year, three from cold stress, one undetermined, one watercraft-related death in April. The issue has been raised about manatee deaths occurring in other counties and the carcass being found in Duval County.

The Sheriff's Office has mailed their boater safety brochure out as a public awareness development. Commissioner Grey indicated that he had received the brochure and was concerned about the method used to identify the slow speed zones for manatee protection in the downtown area. The brochure's chart was somewhat confusing (to Grey).

The Chair reported on a meeting that she, Dr. White and Planning Department Director Brad Thoburn had with Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Executive Director Ken Haddad and Kip Froelich, Section Leader, Imperiled Species Section. Permits had been denied to several marinas on the river because we had surpassed 5

manatee deaths in a year. It was a successful meeting, with the aim of having Jacksonville take certain measures for improved manatee protection that will result in the release/approval of the permits for the marinas. One of the things that Jacksonville has committed to do is a boater survey study.

Shorty Robbins, Chief, Park Development, Parks, Recreation, Entertainment & Conservation Department, apprised the Commission on the FIND Update. Ms. Robbins distributed a report on the status of the requests to FIND that Jacksonville had submitted.

On Pending Legislation, the Commission voted to recommend deferral of **Ordinance 2007-458**, creating a new Ordinance Code Chapter on property taxes for recreational and commercial working waterfront properties. The Commission voted to recommend deferral of **Resolution 2007-578**, relating to hurricane evacuation. The Commission voted to recommend approval of **Ordinance 2007-633**, providing for the deposit of Metro Park Marina Dock Slip Rental fees. The Commission voted to recommend deferral of **Ordinance 2007-659**, concerning marina slips and the Downtown DRI.

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