

TOPIC 1: SCHOOL SAFETY

- School Board member Patrick Canaan said he was pleased with the joint effort by the police departments and the school district since the Parkland Marjorie Stoneman Douglas school tragedies to preserve a safe environment for students and staff within the 40-plus district schools without making the schools “mini fortresses.” However, the egresses and ingresses of the schools have been changed so that there is more control over who and when people can enter and leave the buildings: “People can’t just walk in and out of the schools anymore.”
- St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hartwick introduced. Detective Peggy Tennyson, who is assigned to the SJC School District. Together they reported the following safety measures are in place: There is only one entry/exit way into the schools (there are still emergency exits); 43 S.J.C. Deputies have been assigned to the schools, 39 assigned to individual schools; More will be added as new schools open; students and staff have had active shooter training; resource officers are assigned to all the schools; the goal is to have two deputies assigned to each high school in the school district; there are 90 state-certified crossing guards assigned to 20 schools; there are 36 Public Service Assistants (unarmed) in the schools. “Once there was resistance to having officers on campuses; now they are an integral part of school life.” Sheriff Hartwick acknowledged the “social work” aspect of deputies and PSAs in schools: “There are many mental health issues, and we can’t arrest ourselves out of these problems.”
- Other safety-related measures: For the six new school buildings to open within the next five years, traffic control near the schools and on the school-grounds will be part of the planning, the district is working with FDOT and other agencies in this planning; in response to COVID, face coverings are required for everybody in the schools, with adjustments made when appropriate; social distancing measures are in effect in all schools, and dividers are utilized in classrooms and other areas. Emphasis is on the need for constant review, adjustment and improvement: Superintendent of Schools Tim Forson, “What is today is not what will be tomorrow.” Sheriff Hartwick, “We need to adjust to the growth in the county.”

TOPIC 2: NEW DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH

- The current population of SJC is approx. 261,900; that number is expected to double by 2045. Much of the growth will take place in the NW and NE quadrants.
- Commissioner Henry Dean reported that the half-cent sales surtax approved by SJC taxpayers in 2015 has been a boon to the construction of new schools and other capital projects such, as fortifying schools for safety precautions: “Without that things would have gotten desperate.” Halfway through the ten-year life of the tax approval, proceeds have been ahead of schedule, but there has been a dip in revenue collection due to Covid-19. Receipts are starting to increase as people get back to work, and the tourism and dining industries recover. Superintendent Forson remarked that the district be honest with parents; as population shifts take place in the county and new schools are built, students might be rezoned and moved to other schools to balance student populations in schools. School Board member Bill Mignon noted that, in past decades, students in the northern areas of the county were assigned to schools in Duval County. Mr. Forson emphasized that there will be attempts to keep groups of students together by projected years of graduation.

AFTER THIS TOPIC, THERE WAS A POINT OF ORDER MADE BY KIM KENDALL, A PARENT WHOSE FAMILY RESIDES IN THE NORTHWEST NEIGHBORHOOD OF ST. JOHNS FOREST. SHE AND OTHER PARENTS FROM THIS NEIGHBORHOOD WANTED TO MAKE PUBLIC COMMENTS AT THIS TIME. AFTER SOME DISCUSSION, THE REQUEST WAS GRANTED. THEIR COMMENTS INVOLVED CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN’S SAFETY ON THEIR ROUTE AS THEY WALK OR BIKE TO LIBERTY PINES ACADEMY, 1.8 MILES AWAY, NEAR HEAVILY TRAVELED

ROADS ON WHICH CARS AND TRUCKS ROUTINELY TRAVEL IN EXCESS OF 60 MPH. UNDER STATE LAW, STUDENTS MAY NOT BE BUSED IF THEY LIVE LESS THAN 2 MILES FROM THEIR ASSIGNED SCHOOL. A MOTION WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER BLOCKER TO REFER THE ISSUE BACK TO SCHOOL DISTRICT AND COUNTY ADMINISTRATORS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS, A MOTION SUPPORTED BY VERBAL AGREEMENT AMONG THE MAJORITY OF MEMBERS ON THE COUNTY COMMISSION BOARD.

TOPIC 3: REDISTRICTING (SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS VICKY OAKES, PRESENTER)

- Based on the rule of one-man-or-woman-one-vote, the number of representatives Florida and all 50 states will have in Congress will hopefully be determined by the end of April for the 2022 elections. New district lines will be determined by June 2022. New population figures will not be released by the Census Bureau to the states until August at the earliest. The lateness in the release of information is due to Covid-19. Redistricting is based on population figures.
- It will be up to the State Legislature to redraw Florida's Congressional, FL Senate and FL House district lines. The legislature must determine whether time will allow for the redistricting process to be completed in order to adopt the new lines in time for the 2022 elections. The legislative session is early in 2022 (Jan-March) specifically for adopting the new district lines. Candidate qualifying for federal, state and local offices occurs in June, so Supervisors must receive the information from the state in early April. Supervisors must have time to totally reconfigure our voter registration and tabulation systems with the new districts and voters also have to be notified. (When we receive the new district lines, we also have to redraw our precinct lines to correspond with the new districts), and all of that has to be in place by June (candidate qualifying).
- On a local level, the county commission and school board have shared district lines since 1980. The Board are responsible for redrawing their own district lines based on the new population figures and can only be changed in odd numbered years. Supervisor Oakes recommended the school district and county commission work together to maintain the same district lines again for the next ten years, and to obtain consultants to help them in this work. *(Thanks to Supervisor Oakes for the supplemental information provided after the combined meeting.)*

TOPIC 4: INTERNET CONNECTIVITY IN OUTLYING AREAS OF SJC

- This is especially a problem in the SW part of the county, the communities of Hastings and Flagler Estates in particular. The problem is lack of hardwire service. There has been difficulty when students have tried to use hotspots meant for T-Mobile, AT&T, and Verizon for remote learning. County Administrator Hunter Conrad has agreed to look into this.

TOPIC 5: OPPORTUNITIES FOR A GRADUATION VENUE IN SJC

- A 5,000 to 8,000 capacity is needed
- Currently, most SJC high schools use UNF, at a cost of \$20, 000-\$25,000 per school
- St. Augustine HS and Pedro Menendez use the "The Amp," which has a capacity of 5,000. Commissioner Smith stated that he has been to many graduations at The Amp, and it has usually been hot, rainy, or both. The facility is partially covered.
- Other suggestions were Convention Hall, P.V. Concert Hall, St. Johns River State College. Questions were raised about the capacity of these venues.
- A suggestion was made to seek a private interest that has a profit motive.

At the end of the meeting, Commissioner Blocker recommended that another combined school district/county commission meeting be scheduled for the fall. There seemed to be a general agreement on this proposal.

Submitted by John Pilecki, Feb. 5th, 2021