

St Johns County Civic Roundtable Meeting May 11, 2019

Submitted by Lisa McGlynn

County Report:

- County Budget meetings start May 22, 23 and 24th. This is the first workshop on the budget before it goes to the general public for comment and then to the Commissioners for adoption.
- County “lost” 40 million dollars from not raising the sales tax.

State Legislature Report: Saint Augustine did well.

- 350 K for sewage expansion
- 1.3 million for sheriff’s office
- 750 K for youth services center
- 500 K for dune restoration in Ponte Vedra
- 500 K for AIA improvements in Ponte Vedra
- 200K for veterans nursing home

Speakers were Jen Lomberk, Matanzas Riverkeeper and Lisa Rinaman, St Johns County Riverkeeper

Jen Lomberk, Matanzas Riverkeeper

340 Waterkeepers in 44 countries

Each watershed is unique

Africa to keep water clean for drinking

South America to keep dams from being built

Each waterkeeper works independently

13 Waterkeepers in Florida covering 45,000 square miles

Protect the health of the Matanzas through advocacy, education and community engagement.

Cost more to fix pollution/water problems than it does to keep pollution out of the water.

Governor issued a strong Executive order, but the legislature did not follow through.

Issues she is working on: County Tree Canopy ordinance update

Comprehensive Plan for City and Beach

Save Fish Island

Litter Getter - you can sign up to go out on the boat and help pick up litter.

Single use plastic ordinances - Stop the problem at the front end so not get into our waterways.

Matanzas is not 100% pristine. Impaired areas Fecal coliform and nutrients. Genetic testing is hugely expensive, so we don't know what it is causing the pollution.

Need more testing of septic systems.

Plants and oysters do a phenomenal job of cleaning the water. 1 oyster can clean 50 gallons of water in a day.

Micro plastic is being ingested by animals and crabs and then they starve to death.

Urbanization is the biggest threat. We have a regular tidal flush which helps keep the Matanzas healthy. We are losing wetlands – they store stormwater and filter out pollutants therefore we need to keep development away.

Lisa Rinaman, St Johns Riverkeeper

Healthy Rivers drive healthy communities

St Johns River doesn't flush very well

2005 Green Monster was a toxic bloom that made the river unusable

St Johns River: 8800 square miles and flows north from Indian River county. 2/3 of pollution happens before it gets to St Johns County.

Blue Cypress lake, River of lakes, Hallows cove, Back Water river are spring fed and there are over 100 fresh water springs flowing into St Johns River.

Threat is from overdeveloping in the recharge areas. 90% of our drinking water comes from the springs.

Consumption was 1.5 billion in the 70's - now over 5 billion

Septic tanks - need a mandatory inspection program

Don't permit new septic tanks in areas that should not have them.

Sewage sludge disposed of on lands near headwaters. Reclaimed water has high nutrient content – so don't need to fertilize when you use reclaimed water.

Sewage sludge is banned in south Florida, but is sent up to our area. 70% of sewage sludge coming to St Johns. Now toxic bloom. Lake George bloom fueled by phosphors and can get nitrogen from the air. Nothing to stop it. Reported on April 10th. Everyone on it. Started seeing it at Shands Bridge now.

Need to stop pollution at its source

Central Florida (Orlando) is running out of drinking water, they want to take water out of the St. Johns River.

Dredging in Saint Johns River has caused 12% increase in water levels.

Sea Level rise is costing over \$4 billion.

Not one piece of water quality legislation was passed during this legislative session

Governor DeSantis on day 2, issued a bold executive order on pollution. He is coming through on his promises. Increase in monitoring is happening. Blue Green Algae TaskForce – good news.

People are coming together. Sea Level rise – Jacksonville and Saint Augustine.

Jacksonville Mayor has a storm resiliency committee.

Resolution Passed: HB 7103 Veto Request

The St Johns County Civic Association Roundtable urges Governor DeSantis to veto HB 7103.

Reasons:

- Undermines local elected officials and citizens the right to shape the future of their communities.
- Requires individuals or groups who challenge development proposals and lose, to pay attorney fees even though existing law covers attorney fees for frivolous suits.
- Requires local government to adopt policies in comprehensive plans based on developers' plan for growth, rather than input from local entities.
- Restricts local governments ability to require affordable housing as part of new development.

General Discussion:

Education Report: Neesce High School: high powered vocational program. Integrated into the schools with academic work.

- Engineering auto cad, update
- Communications TV program/photoshop
- Hospitality and Tourism academy: jobs in tourism industry

Good program Emily has agreed to come to speak
Good to see emphasis on meaningful education

Big surprise, majority of students going on to college. Really changed for the better.

- County Sheriffs office will be using neighbor app coordinated with Ring. Suggest they have them come to the Roundtable. Neighbors. Not Nextdoor.
- Your name will be shared with the county when you make a complaint. So ask that you keep it confidential. You should be notified.
- Suggest that the Board send the bio along with the speaker notification.
- Operation New Hope is opening a satellite office in Saint Johns County Reentry program for prisoners. International figure coming to town in mid-July Looking to raise money. Public/private money.
- Guana fight: Upper end owned by Gate Petroleum. Put into conservation and now they want a development. Gate lost the lawsuit and now must go through the comp plan change process. Hearings in Ponte Vedra. Will come to the county in August. When the land was put in conservation, they didn't pay tax and now they want to develop. Make them pay 18 years of back taxes with interest. Donate to Guana/North Florida Land Trust.
- How happy we should be about Fish Island
- Take a trip up to the Northwest of the County. New residents are not interested in the County. Need community activists in the northwest part of the county and a group to bring all these communities together.

NEXT MEETING

Monday, June 10. Speaker will be Ms. Denise Bunnewith, Planning Director, North Florida Transportation Planning Organization.