

St. Johns County Civic Roundtable Minutes
July 13, 2020

Submitted by
Maureen Long, Recording Secretary

The meeting was opened at 9:00 am by Chairman Jim McLane, he welcomed everyone and began by noting that Commissioner Waldron was not with us today, he has been hospitalized with COVID-19, stating that the Commissioner's family has asked for prayers in regards to his recovery. At this time he asked all to keep Commissioner Waldron in our thoughts and prayers, inviting all to join in and say the Pledge of Allegiance.

After the Pledge, Chair McLane asked Vice Chair McGlynn to give a brief announcement about possible Candidate forums. She asked what should we be doing to help citizens with upcoming elections? It was suggested that the Roundtable host Candidate Debates or Forums. Questions could be taken from the Roundtable members and the public or we could post a candidate questionnaire on the Roundtable's Web Page. As of yet there still wasn't any commitment given by Jimmy Johns or either of the Sheriff Candidates. The only candidate who seemed interested so far is Christian Whitehurst, he is running for District 1 County Commissioner.

Chairman McLane asked John Pilecki, the Education Chair to introduce our guest speaker.

Chair Pilecki said it would be his pleasure to do so, and began by welcoming and introducing Mr. Tim Forson, who has been the Superintendent of the St. Johns County School District since 2017. Tim is noted for his 40 years of work in our school district and as a skilled leader as our County's Superintendent of Schools.

Superintendent Forson started by telling us about himself, he was born and raised here in St. Augustine, a graduate of St. Joseph's Academy and only left St. Augustine to go to college. He has been married to his wife Janice for forty years and they have 6 children.

He continued by explaining that growth and safety are the biggest challenges the St. Johns County School system faces today. Growth to start with, while growth can be a challenge it is also a blessing. With growth

comes the ability to welcome new families that relocate to St. Johns County, which gives us the ability to hire new teachers and build new schools. We have been able to build one new school a year and that is due to growth. But along with growth comes anxiety, our school buildings capacities at 1500 and there are over 2000 students enrolled, the need for portable classrooms are required at this point.

As for safety, in 2018 the Parkland shootings brought new meaning to safety and security. Cameras and armed personnel brought tremendous change, and additions to our budget.

And now in 2020, we have the Covid-19 Pandemic. Safety and security has taken on a new meaning , it is health and safety that we are concerned with, sanitizing, social distancing and PPEs. At the end of last year all of our classes were virtual learning. With these virtual classes more challenges arose, this type of class did not work for some students, they will have academic gaps that may take years to bring them back to where they need to be.

As our county grows so do our schools, we have two new schools, High School “HHH”, grades 9-12, housing 2100 students, on St. Johns Parkway, right next to Mill Creek Academy, while K-8 School “MM” will house 1500 students, located at 805 Pine Island Road. We will be rezoning students to these new schools, both are set to open in 2021-2022.

As we plan for this upcoming school year we are hoping to be back in the building learning. Schools need to be open, parents need to work, while all this is true, the numbers in NE Florida show a significant number of families are skeptical of sending kids back to school. Teachers and staff are at risk, this is a real concern. Our District has purchased PPEs and are doing everything we can to keep everyone safe.

When we open this year, we will open with options.

- 1- Back in the building, full time
- 2- School based virtual
- 3- St. Johns Virtual School
- 4- Home Education

Will teachers run class and virtual classes at the same time, live or recorded lessons, not sure. Some teachers will be online, virtual only and some only in the building.

What to do with kids at risk, some cases mentoring online, we need to accommodate high risk staff, individual isolation, the ability to apply social distance when on the buses, these are just some of the challenges moving into the upcoming school year.

Then there's scheduling, elementary ages go to school 5 days a week, secondary school age may split 2 or 3 days with the 5th day virtual. We will work with the Department of Health, testing and tracing, if a teacher or student tests positive that class will move to virtual learning to stop the spread.

We won't be able to have tutors and mentors coming into the schools, school will be open just to essential workers only, to limit the risk. As time goes on we will know more or less of the restrictions being used in schools.

It is confirmed no field trips off site for the first quarter, we will have external agencies come to schools for the field trip experience, or we may use virtual field trips as we move forward.

It's important to establish routine first for all of our classes. In preparation to accomplish learning and safety in our plan we may push back the date of when classes begin. The SJC Health Department has a strong role in our School District and will be helping us with the guidelines to follow in keeping students and staff safe.

Chair McLane opens the floor for questions.

First question, at a recent PZB meeting Dr. Hilsenbeck stated that 60,000 home sites are unbuilt, with a proposed population for 14 new high schools at a cost of \$40 million, where will this funding come from? Do we have a 5, 10, 20 year plan looking ahead? We are already two high schools short.

Answer: Our county studies the impact fees, along with growth management to see the funding available for our 44,000 students. The new K-8 school is being funded in part from the Half-Cent Sales Surtax and School Impact Fees. These impact fees come from new residential growth that brings the revenue and the revenue follows the students.

Second question, who will pay for the PPEs teachers and staff will need to use everyday?

Answer: The school board has spent \$1.6 million on PPEs, we are hoping to get that all back from the federal government, the way it works is you spend the money up front and then get reimbursed.

Superintendent Forson was thanked by Chair McLane for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak at this mornings meeting.

The Chair moved to Roundtable business, asking for approval of minutes from the June 8th, 2020 meeting. Corrections were acknowledged and completed, a motion was made and seconded, with minutes approved.

Co-Chair McGlynn announced that Amy Koch, President of the St. Johns Audubon Society joined recently with 17 active members, adding \$325.00 in dues, bringing the SunTrust Bank Account balance to \$1275.70.

Next Janet Patten, Chair of Government Affairs gave her Report, as follows:

On June 23, 2020, a free webinar was held, St. Johns County 2070: What's Next?, was focused on smart growth policy tools and recommendations shared by 1000 Friends of Florida Policy & Planning Director Jane West, with a question and answer period at the end. For more information go to <https://1000fof.org/county/stjohns/> to see these smart growth policies and recommendations that include; Reinstating the LAMP Program, Invoking a super majority vote needed to change the County's Comprehensive Plan and all of the results from both the November 2019 workshops that were held.

Governor Ron DeSantis cut away almost all add on appropriations of \$1 billion from the state budget. Such as \$3 million in funding for the beach and dune restoration in north Ponte Vedra Beach, the \$350,000 for West St. Augustine sewer expansion is gone, including \$750,000 for Flagler College, \$250,000 for the St. Augustine Lighthouse tower and \$750,000 for the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center.

Good news no cuts to the \$500 million plan to boost teachers salaries, or the \$100 million promised to Florida Forever.

Upcoming SJC Budget, the overview for the 2021 budget will be \$95.5 million. With an increase of \$21.5 million from property tax revenue.

Millage rate will be looked at in August. The county hasn't touched its reserves, we have AA+ Credit Rating, with the Budget coming up in September.

Janet proposed a resolution should strongly be made to reinstate the County's LAMP Program, we need to be competitive if we plan on getting any of the Florida Forever Funding. We will need to have funding from the county to use as a vehicle to match Florida Forever monies. Motion was made, seconded, all in favor. Janet will write the resolution, submit for signing by Chair McLane and then email it to each of the SJC Commissioners.

Next is Chair of Education John Pilecki, he has committed to attend the SJC School Board meetings and report back the progress being made for plans of the upcoming school year.

Chair McLane reminds all that next month's meeting will be at 12 noon on Monday, August 10th as a zoom meeting, with a presentation on the legal aspects of HOA's. It would be great if you could pass this on to your full Board of Directors and invite them to attend. Now is the time we will go "around the room or zoom screen" to hear what is current in your association or an item that you think would be of interest.

1st Item; Concerns about increased residential and less commercial properties are being passed by the PZA. It seems to be moving in the wrong direction. We should plan for businesses, these votes have an impact on our schools, take a look at the archived PZA meetings and see how the voting is being done.

2nd Item; Great concern for the lack of Mandatory Masks in our County.

3rd Item; Luckily no budget cuts for the improvement that will ease the traffic on A1A, Jim Knight from FDOT has been helpful in making sure the improvements are funded.

4th Item; Dune report in Ponte Vedra, reduction in state funds. HOAs are following the sand project in North Beach Vilano, the County is going forward, a contractor hired in April anticipates the end of September with 6 months to complete the project.

Chair McLane stated we seem to be done with items of interest. Thanks everyone. See you August 10th via Zoom for lunch! Meeting was adjourned at 10:20.