

St. Johns County Civic Roundtable Minutes

November 9, 2020

Submitted by Maureen Long, Recording Secretary

The meeting was Via Virtual Zoom Teleconference and was opened at 12:00 noon by Chairman Jim McLane, he thanked everyone for joining the St. Johns Civic Roundtable today. Then asked all to stand and join him in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman McLane welcomed Commissioner Waldron to this morning's meeting with all agreeing it was good to have him back with us. Chair then introduced our guest speakers, County Attorney Patrick McCormack, who has served as St. Johns County Attorney since 2006 and Michael Roberson, who is the Interim Director of Growth Management for St. Johns County.

Mr. McCormack began by explaining that the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners recognized the importance of having citizens involved in their local government by having them participate in government. In 2007 the Board of County Commissioners formalized and passed the Neighborhood Bill of Rights ordinance that gives neighborhood and homeowner associations the ability to receive more information, and the right to increase involvement of concern in their communities through county notification.

An organization or citizen can register with the county's Neighborhood Bill of Rights by completing an application either online or in the County Administrator's Office.

Wrapping up the presentation, Mr. McCormack and Mr. Roberson said they would take questions or hear concerns at this time. Members asked the following questions and stated concerns; with Mr. McCormack and Mr. Roberson responding:

- When receiving the emailed NBRs it is not clear until you open the pdf as to what kind of notice it is. It's clear the county staff put a lot of time into creating each notice. Perhaps these notices can be streamlined as a better means of time by all, staff and the receiver.
- Is it possible for the county to improve its notices of proposed land use changes with better maps in the notice and with more descriptive detail? The current maps are very difficult to read and don't describe the property very well. And the accompanying language is mostly legal boilerplate. I refer to both the notices in the Record and the Bill of Rights notices.
- With very few exceptions, community attendance at Community Meetings has been zero to too few.

- County provides notices that are required in the newspaper, mail outs to citizens that live within 300 feet of the property, signage at the property and through NBR notifications before the meetings. Also, for further information the Development tracker that is on the county website is available. The county is not responsible for making sure the community attends the meetings beyond that.
- The county web site is not easy to navigate, it's difficult to find what you are looking for. Modernization of the technology, there needs to be easier ways to search, perhaps some sort of sub-settings.
- There have been times when an applicant has provided material to the county with misrepresentations. These are not always caught by Growth Management but come out during BCC meetings.
- If material is found to be misrepresented the applicant and their request will be dismissed.
- The Julington Creek HOA has begun publishing Neighborhood Bill of Rights notices it receives. This is a very good local public service.
- There have been times when notices were not sent out for upcoming Land Development changes, such as the tree ordinance in May of this year. This was a concern to many who have been interested and involved working with county staff as stakeholders to form better tree ordinances in the county.
- Changes or amendments to the Land Development Code (LDC), should have been received by the Neighborhood Bill of Rights Notification.

Co-Chair McGlynn suggested all these concerns and suggestions could be put into a list and shared with county staff to have better communications with citizens and staff. Members of the Roundtable could meet at another time to further discuss any other suggestions or ideas on this subject.

Mr. Roberson stated that the goal of NBR is to inform the citizens as to what is going on with growth and be able to participate in local government. He would gladly work with members of the Roundtable on ways to better the NBR so it would be easier for citizens to access notifications and have more involvement at county meetings.

Chairman McLane thanked Mr. McCormack and Mr. Roberson for their time this afternoon and the work they do for our county.

Chair moved onto Roundtable business, asking for approval of October's 2020 minutes, motion was made and second, minutes were approved.

Chair asked for Janet Patten's Gov't Affairs Report.

Janet Patten reported:

STATE LEGISLATURE

Republicans gained 5 seats in the House and won 2 open seats in the Senate.

It's been 8 months since the Florida Legislature last met. They will return to Tallahassee on Nov. 17 for swearing in new members and picking new leaders. Gov. DeSantis floated the idea of taking up some bills this month, but Republican lawmakers did not take the bait.

Regular Session begins in March next year for 2 months.

FISH ISLAND

According to press accounts, Gate said they planned to begin construction of their car wash next to Fish Island by the end of the year. However, the St. Johns River Water Management District has raised many questions regarding their application which will take some time and further study to respond. Gate has 90 days to do so.

The Florida Department of State, Division of Historic Resources & State Historic Preservation is requiring Gate to perform an archaeological survey by professionals of the area on Fish Island which Gate proposes to disturb with its construction of their stormwater pond. Until this study is conducted, the Department of State's division cannot consent further on the Gate car wash application.

Furthermore, the Northeast Florida Regional Council has deferred making a recommendation concerning the Gate permit application until more questions and concerns can be answered.

LAMP LAND CONSERVATION

As was reported last week Dennis Hollingsworth, the SJC Tax Collector, testified that his office has an excess of \$5.8 million in fees to add to the general revenue budget. The Civic Roundtable has advocated for several years that the LAMP be reconstituted only to be told there was no money. With some of these new funds now available, the LAMP program can now be funded.

LAMP can be an important investment in the future of our county. Our county's beaches, rivers and countryside are integral parts of our economic engine. We should be doing everything we can to protect and enhance these invaluable assets. If you recall last month, I reported on similar land acquisition and conservation programs were up for renewal in Volusia and Collier counties and

both passed overwhelmingly. Manatee County adopted a new tax to fund its land acquisition and conservation program. There are over a dozen other Florida counties that fund similar programs.

Janet proposed the following resolution: “The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable requests the Land Acquisition and Management Program be reconstituted with funds available from excess fees collected.”

A motion was made and seconded, all were in favor to adopt the following resolution: “The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable requests the Land Acquisition and Management Program be reconstituted with funds available from excess fees collected”; to be presented to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners 11/17/2020 meeting.

SJC LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES for 2021

1) Determine the future of our County with input from the community through a visioning process.

Future of our County -- Visioning Process

The Roundtable recommends that the Commission embark on a process to seek community input on the future of the County and set a strategic and comprehensive plan and then stick to it. That way developers, builders, realtors, the community and county staff will be able to have clear direction on the future of our County.

2) Support a 1% increase in the bed tax. SJC has the lowest bed tax in the state. Support an Increase in the Bed Tax-

In March 2019, the Commission rejected a 1% increase to the “Tourist Development Tax”. The increase was supported by the Roundtable, the Visitors & Convention Bureau, Tourist Development Council, Chamber of Commerce and several business lodging leaders. Visitors should help pay for the services they use when they are here.

3) LAMP reconstituted so our county can be competitive with other counties seeking similar state funding which require matching funds. This vital conservation program at its last funding level was \$300,000.

Most of our neighboring counties have had conservation programs for some time. If SJC ever hopes of getting state Florida Forever funds in the future, it will need local matching funds.

4) ECO-Tourism is becoming increasingly popular and needs to be encouraged here in St. Johns County. Our County is rich in ecology and beautiful natural

resources that are attracting many visitors. We believe that eco-tourism should be emphasized and that appropriate personnel and resources be devoted to eco-tourism.

5) Five-year sunset on permits — further study on this issue is needed and will report back in December.

We need a resolution to adopt these priorities as the SJC BOCC may begin raising some of these issues at its next commission meeting on Nov. 17 when Christian Whitehurst is sworn in and Commissioner Blocker will become Chairman.

A motion was made and seconded to adopt, all were in favor of the SJC Legislative Priorities for 2021.

Chair asked for John Pilecki's Education Affairs Report.
John reported the School Board meeting was scheduled for the next day, 11/10/20.

The question of concern was stated that with all the growth in our county will our water supply sustain our communities. If you look at the St. Johns County Utilities Integrated Water Resource Plan (IWRP) it states the Main System will likely need additional infrastructure, before 2020 and additional water supply sources to meet future demands by 2030, this is a real reason for concern.

Chair McLane thanked everyone for coming, wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and reminded all that our next meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 14 at noon.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20.