

St. Johns County Civic Roundtable Minutes  
June 8, 2020

Submitted by  
Maureen Long, Recording Secretary

The meeting was opened at 9:01 am by Chairman Jim McLane, greeting everyone to the meeting and asked all to join in and say the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman McLane introduced Linda Stoughton, the St. Johns County Director of Emergency Management since 2014, and a county employee for over 34 years.

Ms. Stoughton spoke on how the Emergency Operations Center is being used in handling the Covid Crisis in SJC. On March 17, 2020 it turned into the hub for distributing PPEs, where Executive Orders were processed and shared. The Department of Health, Flagler Hospital staff, Emergency Medical Teams, Law Enforcement, and Representatives from all over St. Johns County came for Meetings and press conferences. These were all held outside, at the back of the EOC or in the parking lot for safe distancing purposes.

This became very different from other emergencies, things had flipped from giving to the community, this time taking. Doing testing where the swab is taken and sent off to a lab for results. At this time Ms. Stoughton stated that we had 276 positive tests and 6 deaths in SJC.

She moved on to Hurricane season, which was starting on the day of this meeting and what changes have been made by the state for hurricane season. The main changes are to know what zone your home is located in and add PPEs to your hurricane kit. 2 face coverings for every person, one to wear and one to wash for the next day.

You can go to the EOC website to find your zone, all the updates for hurricane season, where shelters are and the state's new plan for using hotels as shelters. Being that we are in this Covid situation with social distancing our shelters are going to be revamped, again all this info can be found on the EOC website, listed below-

<https://www.sjcemergencymanagement.com/>

Chair McLane thanked Ms. Stoughton for speaking today and for her many years of service to our County.

The Chair moved to Roundtable business, asking for approval of minutes from May 11, 2020. A motion was made and seconded.

Co-Chair McGlynn gave the Treasurer's report stating \$1081.72 in the SunTrust Bank Account and that there were still some outstanding dues, if anyone needed an invoice, email her for one.

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

### State Update

The Florida Cabinet recently held its first meeting during the pandemic and approved spending \$79M to preserve some 32,000 acres from the Panhandle down to Green Swamp in south Florida. Governor DeSantis stated: "*Conserving lands for the future generations is vital to our state's environmental heritage.*" I think it is interesting to note the Governor's use of the word "heritage" because when the precursor to Florida Forever was initially established in the 1970's, Florida was looked upon as a national leader and model in conserving land for public benefit. Hopefully DeSantis's comments are a sign that the \$100M appropriated for Florida Forever in the pending budget will be safe from the veto pen.

Governor DeSantis must sign and line item veto the pending \$91.4B budget bill any day now before the new fiscal year begins on July 1. During April state revenues fell \$878M below estimates. The May numbers are not yet available. The latest numbers may determine whether there is a need to convene a special session of the legislature to adjust the budget or whether there is enough monies in reserves combined with Federal emergency funding (\$4.6B). If budget projections are 1.5% of the budget, a special session of the legislature must be convened to adjust for the revenue shortfalls. Even without May numbers, projections are about 1.3% of the budget. Unlike the loss of sales tax revenue, document stamp revenue exceeded projections for April.

Five days last week, the state's daily total of new cases of CORVID-19 surpassed 1000. Last Thursday, the state recorded 1,413 new cases which was the highest daily count yet. We encourage everyone to continue to maintain safe practices against the pandemic.

### County Budget Workshop

For three days in late May, SJC staff conducted a budget workshop to review the OMB proposed 2020-2021 budget with Commissioners and department staff. This is not the final budget as it will be revised before submitting it to the Commission and for public hearings by mid-July. The Commission must approve a final budget before mid-September to begin the new fiscal year on October first.

Lisa and I attended the first day of the budget workshops and left when discussions focused on Animal Control vehicles, so this gives you an idea of the detail involved in crafting the new budget. The proposed budget has a 9.9% increase in property valuations for a \$17.8M increase in property tax revenue. By July the county should have a better indication of the loss of sales tax revenue and other sources. For example, OMB is projecting a \$2M loss in gas taxes and \$3M in the bed tax revenues. The 625 page budget is accessible on the web if you are so interested.

### Tree Fine Ordinance

As you recall at our May meeting, we discussed the county's Tree Fine Ordinance and the Roundtable's response. We submitted our resolution in writing to Commissioners and I spoke by telephone on its behalf during the meeting. The Roundtable and other interested parties urged amending the ordinance to include the Southern Live Oak and increase fines to more accurately reflect replacement costs and to be competitive with neighboring counties. We also urged expanding the covered area from the new boundary of the Intracoastal Waterway to the west, possibly to I-95. The Commission went ahead and unanimously adopted the tree fine ordinance without amendments.

Commissioner Henry Dean thanked the Civic Roundtable and the Matanzas Riverkeeper for our constructive comments and left the door open to revisit the ordinance in the near future. Commissioner Dean felt it was more important to adopt the ordinance now so it could be enforced, especially since the issue has been around for some time. We will try to work with affected parties and see if we can reach a common ground to take back to the Commission.

### County Economic Outlook

The NE Florida Regional Council commissioned a study which forecast 41,000 regional jobs lost to COVID virus during 2020. St. Johns County is predicted to lose

4,354 jobs in 2020 compared to 2019 and a 2.6% loss in gross domestic product value. Overall the study conducted by the University of Michigan stated the effects on NE Florida are expected to be 15% more severe than the national average.

(Note: NE Florida Counties are Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Putnam, Nassau and St. Johns. Council was formed in 1977 to promote coordination of federal, state and local government agencies.)

### St. Johns 2070 Study and 1000 Friends of Florida

Remember the two well-attended town halls which the Civic Roundtable helped to sponsor with 1000 Friends of Florida and the Audubon Society discussing growth projections for St. Johns as well as tools to ensure a more sustainable future. On June 23, 6:00-7:00 p.m., 1000 Friends of Florida will host a webinar to discuss its recommendations for smart growth practices. We encourage you to sign up for the webinar. The sign up site will be in our newsletter or on the web.

On June 3, 2020, 1000 Friends of Florida challenged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit Court the 2019 state law that requires citizens to pay all attorney fees when losing lawsuits challenging local government orders. This case pertains to HB 7103 provisions which all but abolishes Growth Management laws. The Roundtable opposed HB 7103 at the time and urged a veto by the Governor. After hearing oral arguments last week, the judge issued an oral decision with prejudices to be followed by a written one against the plaintiff, 1000 Friends of Florida. The environmental group will appeal to the Appellate Court. Just to illustrate how onerous this law is, an appeal by Maggy Hurchalla forced her to pay \$4.4M in Attorney fees as punishment for opposing a billionaire developer's rock mine in Martin County. The moral of this story is you need to be a billionaire or very rich to challenge these local development orders. End of my report.

After the government report the floor was opened for discussion. It was asked and all were in agreement that a link to the SJC Supervisor of Elections site would be added to the Roundtable's Web Page. There were 2 topics for discussion. The first was the disappointment in the new Tree Fine Ordinance and lack of protection for the county's trees. It was decided that Janet Patten would be the contact person to work on increasing the jurisdiction and further tree protection.

The second came with news that the Board of County Commissioners made known that staff would no longer make staff presentations during PZA

meetings. It will be on the applicant for growth management type items quasi-judicial and the like. The applicant has to be prepared and do a presentation. Staff will still be there on standby to make corrections or any other additional information that they feel needs to come up and be available for questions. Questions were asked what prompted this change? At the end of discussion it was resolved that further information was to be gathered.

Chairman McLane adjourned the meeting at 11:03