

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Meeting
Monday, October 25, 2021

The City Commission met in formal session Monday, October 25, 2021 at 3:00 P.M. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Tracy Upchurch, and the following were present:

1. Roll Call: Tracy Upchurch, Mayor/City Commissioner
Nancy Sikes-Kline, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner
Roxanne Horvath, City Commissioner
John Valdes, City Commissioner
Barbara Blonder, City Commissioner

Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager
Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney
Darlene Galambos, City Clerk
Mark Simpson, Director, Financial Services
David Birchim, Director, Planning and Building
Reuben Franklin, Director, Public Works
Todd Grant, Director, Utilities
Melissa Wissel, Communications Director
Corey Sakyrd, Deputy Director, General Services
Jessica Beach, Chief Resilience Officer
Jennifer Michaux, Police Chief
Laura Morse, Recording Secretary

2. General Public Comments

Public comment was opened, and the Commission heard from the following member of the public:

- Ed Slavin

Public comment was closed.

3. Overview of the City's Resilience Program and Strategy

Jessica Beach, Chief Resilience Officer, recited the definition of resilience: "that capacity to recover / bounce back from shocks and stressors", which for the City were primarily hurricanes, strong nor'easters, and nuisance flooding. She indicated the workshop goals were to engage staff with the Commission for

feedback and guidance which drove project prioritization, planning efforts, and strategy. She stated the Public Works and Utilities quarterly update at the end of her presentation would tie into the discussion, and additional public comment would be permitted if time allowed. She provided a comprehensive review of the City's resilience policy.

The Commission and Ms. Beach discussed:

- Vulnerability assessment completed on nuisance flooding which was dependent on sea level rise that would affect flooding as early as 2030 or 2100
- Assessment was based on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) sea level rise scenarios from their 2012 database and the Army Corps of Engineers scenarios

published from Mayport in 2016; therefore, this was occurring more rapidly than anticipated

- Address recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan from recent data to assist with planning projects
- State adopted a 2040 and 2070 planning horizon for new vulnerability assessments and looked at NOAA intermediate low and intermediate high to narrow in on projection curves
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recent report stated global temperatures would reach 1-1/2 degrees Celsius by 2040, which was 10 years earlier than estimated five years ago, and was based on 14,000 scientific papers

Commissioner Blonder stressed the importance to revisit the Strategic Adaptation Plan based on the recent data and recommended updating the Coastal Vulnerability Assessment.

Commissioner Valdes stated the data was old, climate change was accelerating, and certain areas would be impacted to a non-functional status. He noted concern with placing money into projects that could be better spent retreating, and 'the moving target' was not moving in the City's favor.

Commissioner Horvath believed Commissioner Valdes' concerns were addressed since they looked at areas where they would not necessarily retreat.

Ms. Beach acknowledged that the Stormwater Master Plan looked at scenarios, planning, costs, cost benefit, and the planning horizon.

Ms. Beach reviewed the City's current resilience projects.

There was discussion among Commissioner Sikes-Kline and Ms. Beach regarding recent participation in FEMA's cost-share program:

- Out of 42 interested, 25 participated
- Application required a flood elevation certificate, flood insurance, three quotes from different contractors, and a narrow window to submit
- Next year's plan was to work with local contractors to begin process earlier and allow applicants time to gather materials
- Repetitive flood loss and requirement for flood insurance with required prior claims eliminated many without either
- FEMA program was very defined, and although many applicants flooded, the percentage threshold was not crossed
- Consider cost-share amount with other program supplements
- City should develop own program and criteria to assist residents

Mayor Upchurch requested to postpone discussion of a City assistance program to a later time.

Ms. Beach reviewed the City's resilience planning, and the following was discussed with the Commission:

- Stormwater Master Plan provided a roadmap for capital improvements
- Reviewed City of Miami's Stormwater Master Plan as a guideline
- Coastal and rainfall driven flooding
- State had approximately \$20 million in planning funds available
- Comprehensive Plan recommended engaging the Army Corps of Engineers to perform a "Back Bay" feasibility study and City was approved for participation; however, congressional dollars were needed to begin, funds were very competitive, a cost-share agreement was necessary, and Washington had to be lobbied
- Participation may position City for funding federal dollars to larger infrastructure projects
- Congressman Rutherford got the item into the budget as a line item and it would be monitored through remainder of the legislative session

- After feasibility study completion, a three-year study followed involving heavy community engagement
- Chief Engineer of Corps would sign off on the study, then competition with other cities and counties ensued to get the cost-share dollars
- Other municipalities who went through the process were Charleston, Miami-Dade, Monroe County and Norfolk

Ms. Beach stated she would reach out to the Army Corps to gather further information on their involvement.

Ms. Beach continued review of the planning and study needs list, the seawall ordinance, dealing with bulkheads, and working with private property owners on flood walls.

The Commission and Ms. Beach discussed:

- Adding natural features, such as living shorelines, to bolster the built structure approach
- Compared wall systems and berm systems; berms took more area and made a vertical structure necessary due to limited access, property size at the marsh area, and location challenges
- Improving a seawall was of limited impact unless neighbors chose to do the same
- There was no minimum elevation requirement to construct a seawall on non-bulkheaded property and there should be a cap for bulkheads or barriers with living shoreline or frontage rip rap; however, City was limited in space and building a bulkhead two feet below base was low hanging fruit
- Challenge was a 'weak link fix' with multiple elevations trying to protect from flooding
- General education and outreach were important with some items on the City's website; however, a complete resource list to search and empower citizen decisions was necessary, and would eliminate using staff time for workshops

- Tools and resources available:
 - NOAA Sea Level Rise Floodplain Bureau
 - Online property research
 - Floodfactor.com (assumed an elevation at zero feet above sea level so owners should make sure properties correctly represented)
- A Flood Elevation Certificate was the most accurate at showing the risk and was built into the flood insurance rate

Ms. Beach indicated she would research the seawall and berm systems and return to the Commission with feedback.

Ms. Beach concluded that residents inquired about water quality improvements and dredging Lake Maria Sanchez. She said the issue was examined, minor dredging was necessary to put in infrastructure, and this was a large topic which required review at another date.

4. Review of City's Projects List and Priorities for Commission Input and Discussion

Ms. Beach reviewed the Projects and their stages of progress, noted grant funding was submitted, and that if awarded, infrastructure and upgrades could be done.¹

There was significant discussion among Ms. Beach and the Commission regarding South Davis Shores, with the following highlighted:

- One of the more low-lying vulnerable neighborhoods
- Upgrade storm infrastructure, inlets, and re-grade the coquina ditch, which was affected by the two types of flooding
- Higher surges were inevitable and required review of future sea level rise conditions, which meant pump stations and flood walls were required
- Study sent to neighborhood residents, and interest shown in partnering with the

¹ Included with original Commission packet

City for a flood wall which required review for options and cost, and would be examined in the Master Plan

- A floodwall was the reality for the neighborhood, and could eventually find high ground to tie into the bulkhead
- Pumping stations were the solution and would be dependent on wall height and how quickly the water rose
- Smart valves were located in three tidally influenced areas of the neighborhood: Coquina Ditch, Hermosa, and Old Quarry Road:
 - Traditional inline valves could not be used; smart valves operated by staying open to maintain hydrology, but closed in advance of a high tide
 - Looked at combining drainage improvements with smart valves, but challenge was flood walls, dealing with private property, and needing a pump station to move the water
- Steps taken in right direction; however, concerned with spending two or three million dollars for a solution that would last just a few years; however, a seawall would suffice another 15 or 20 years

Ms. Beach reviewed top priority projects which included the West Augustine Septic to Sewer conversion, King Street Flood Mitigation, Plaza de la Constitucion Flood and Drainage, and Alcazar Room and Llambias House flood proofing. She advised her intent was to include potentially relevant projects from other studies, such as Resilient Heritage Study, and she directed the Commission to the more advanced projects.

Ms. Beach assured Mayor Upchurch the West Augustine septic to sewer conversion and King Street flood mitigation were both well underway.

Commissioner Blonder said she looked forward to successful backflow improvements. She indicated her personal participation in FEMA's cost-share program, it was a major hurdle, and FEMA changed

the rules right before the deadline, requiring a revision to initial flood insurance quotes.

Commissioner Blonder inquired about the groundwater monitoring network and detection of saltwater intrusion, and she suggested developing a threshold to implement an action plan that was serious about monitoring, since fresh water supply came from the aquifer.

Ms. Beach stated this was just one piece which stemmed from the septic tank study and had an impact on road function. She said that groundwater monitoring was on State Resilient Florida's approval list but it was flagged for eligibility, and she submitted applications to further it; however, data rates required collection to determine impact, if they could cost-share it would assist with project ranking, and it was fairly easy to install the data wells to begin data collection. She continued everything was ranked by December 1st, then it went to legislation for funding consideration, then funding took three years, and feasibly they would get contracts by October 1st, then data would require collection.

Commissioner Valdes stated saltwater intrusion was the most important and least expensive topic on the list, and the rate of change was unknown but could provide how seawater impacted the City, which gauged decisions on spending money towards other projects. He continued once projects were approved then completed, they may already be redundant; therefore, he would approve writing a \$150,000 check immediately to get a monitoring system in place, since the sooner they started, the sooner they had data. He requested a conversation with the Commissioners on obtaining the money.

Ms. Beach stated 11 applications for projects were sent before September 1st, the State had 600 applications, there was \$500 million available for infrastructure, and \$2.5 billion in needs for the State; therefore, it would be very competitive. She said the Resilient Florida Program was enormous

and showed the needs of the State, and legislature attention would assist the City to take advantage of the funding sources while available. She reviewed the funding of projects on the higher priority list.

Commissioner Valdes thanked Ms. Beach for her work at submitting the applications.

Ms. Beach recalled the topics for which the Commission requested review; Seawall ordinance, review Stormwater Master Plan update, Back Bay Feasibility Study with Army Corps, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) through FEMA.

Mayor Upchurch concurred with Commissioner Valdes' statements and noted wisdom was needed to determine at what level they fought the problem. He acknowledged frustration with the pace of government at State and local levels, and he questioned whether to aim for a larger project, anticipating longer protection, or to exercise a traditional approach.

The Commission and Ms. Beach discussed:

- Getting these projects into the funding program would greatly benefit the City
- Further review was needed and it took time to review alternatives, planning horizon, and cost benefit, and could move forward with 'low hanging fruit'; drainage improvements, more valves, or look long-term at higher level of flood protection and benefits, or run the projects concurrently
- Missing a cost benefit analysis; questioned how to filter the many projects to determine which ones to start immediately and which ones could wait
- Two things drove this topic:
 - Availability of money which took time to obtain, and they should grab everything available
 - How much time was available to react, actual reaction decision, and potential redundancy once in place

- Seven-foot bulkheads at the bayfront were intended, and it made sense Lake Maria Sanchez went two feet higher, versus building another system which was the design elevation that tied back to the Comprehensive Plan
- Should build into the design the ability to elevate at a later date
- List was better than they ever had, and staff was trusted on these issues
- Ordinance revision was suggested, and a study was unnecessary
- Much input was gained from the outreach educational program
- Should not lose the 'personal touch' and work with Real Estate professionals and homeowners
- City's website needed a robust section

Commissioner Sikes-Kline emphasized her focus on a homeowner program which provided direct assistance to those not meeting FEMA requirements, in the form of buy backs, outright grants, or supplements for elevating, and she asked Ms. Beach to place her energy into this topic.

Mayor Upchurch was amiable to hear more about City assistance for homeowners, but hesitant about the cost benefit, and although it might not be the best, a federal resource existed. He stated they could elevate homes; however, if homes were inaccessible due to water in the streets for extended periods, an elevated home did no good for the neighborhood. He concurred with Commissioner Blonder and Commissioner Valdes regarding the stormwater monitoring.

Commissioner Blonder suggested they plan for managed retreat which impacted social and environmental justice issues by displacing communities, and the protection of cultural and historic heritage was paramount.

Commissioner Valdes noted the following:

- Managed retreat topic was on the DOT radar many years ago
- Population shifts came with climate change
- Migration was occurring from downtown to West Augustine
- Lifting houses was great but would not solve the problem since you could not lift the neighborhood
- Look at either triage and retreating or building walls until necessary to retreat
- Better data needed for decisions on spending money
- Everyone on coast would be fighting for federal dollars
- \$150,000 was a drop in the bucket

Mayor Upchurch indicated they all had friends and neighbors who had undertaken their own managed retreat by selling low lying property for higher elevation, and calculations differed for rental property versus your own home. He continued many homes in South Davis Shores were converted to short-term or long-term rentals which became a complicated calculation on return maximization and property value, and although the City was a local government player, they could not choose what people did in their best interests. He concluded that pressure was on West Augustine due to higher demand for properties based on the elevation.

Commissioner Blonder stated resource limitations were not only financial, but limited staffing, and adding a GIS technician and grant writer would not meet grant proposal preparation needs, engineering design, and neighborhood involvement. She recalled that Ms. Beach had suggested partnerships at zero cost and starting a task force to explore opportunities to pool resources. She suggested GTM research reserve which was heavily involved in resilience issues and had funding, and academic institutions could assist with website work.

Ms. Beach advised they partnered with GTM reserve, collaborated with Flagler College, and envisioned a meeting with the City of Jacksonville Resilience officer, which would move the needle on the partnerships. She stated the County had more isolated areas, other priorities, and it was not as widespread an issue for them.

Mayor Upchurch stated that Matthew and Irma flooding was from the intercoastal and not the ocean, the County had many more miles of intercoastal and should have a deep-seated interest, and information should be targeted and specific versus anecdotal conversations regarding the effects of flooding.

Commissioner Blonder indicated the Building Code Task Force (BCTF) process should continue from the Strategic Adaptation Plan recommendation to create stormwater utility fee credits for low-income developments, green infrastructure improvements, impervious surface reductions, and installation of detention basins. She stated homeowners and builders could implement retention by capturing falling water and allowing slower infiltration, and she asked for consideration of a stormwater utility fee credit structure.

Commissioner Valdes reviewed the issues dealt with on flooding; water from the sky, flooding from nor'easters, hurricanes, and tropical storms, ocean rise, and climate change. He said they should prioritize the flooding type importance and be specific on how to use the money due to limited resources and the forthcoming tsunami that would make all their efforts moot.

Commissioner Blonder requested Commission feedback on a stormwater fee credit which would be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Mayor Upchurch was amiable to consider the topic but suggested reviewing at a higher level to ensure it was financially

feasible to the Fund's integrity, and that it provided a benefit to larger developers.

Reuben Franklin, Director, Public Works, explained the current credit process in place, which was only accessible for those with a permitted stormwater management system and application process; however, it did not incentivize best management practices for low impact development but could be reviewed for modification.

Ms. Beach noted the topic surfaced with the BCTF and with the pending lot development grading plan would incentivize better management of rainfall driven property flooding. She stated all comments could be included within the Stormwater Master Plan update and the Comprehensive Plan, to consider the social, economic, and environmental issues. She advised the Commission's feedback was super helpful.

Commissioner Blonder asked if the new data from IPCC's recent report would assist with updating the Strategic Adaptation Plan or the Vulnerability Assessment, or should they just act more quickly and prioritize the next steps.

Ms. Beach advised the intent of the Stormwater Master Plan was to review everything done and update the modeling and projections, because it would look at rainfall changes and sea level rise; however, the issue was with secured funding and timing.

There was Commission consensus to direct Ms. Beach to prepare a memo which summarized what she heard at the meeting, along with any questions from a staff point of view.

Ms. Beach affirmed she would put together a higher-level summary with feedback, priorities, options in moving forward, and additional questions.

Commissioner Blonder thanked Ms. Beach and City staff for everything done to pull this

information together. She noted the City was well positioned to move forward with these projects and address any challenges.

Mayor Upchurch concurred with Commissioner Blonder's comments.

Commissioner Valdes suggested everyone obtain a copy of the pamphlet prepared by Jenny Wolfe, former Historic Planner, which addressed historic structures, was excellent information, and very well done.

Ms. Beach advised that hard copies of the pamphlet would be provided to the Commission and that it was located on the City's website.

5. Utility and Public Works Quarterly Update

Mr. Franklin reviewed the active projects within Public Works and Utilities which corresponded with the presentation provided by Ms. Beach:

- FEMA 13 Lift Stations were being lifted, when possible, to the 100-year flood plain plus two feet, and areas would be flood-proofed where this could not be done
- West Augustine Gravity Sewer Design, including West 3rd Street and Pearl Street design, worked with the schoolboard to take ownership of an existing pumping station at Webster School, enabling buildout of more gravity sewer in the area

Mr. Franklin was unaware if the City owned the pumping station; however, it was approved by the schoolboard and they awaited the return of documents.

Mayor Upchurch noted this was a win-win for all involved, the schoolboard was most likely delighted to get rid of the pumping station, and this allowed the City to expand service. He thanked Mr. Franklin for his work on the project.

Todd Grant, Director, Utilities, raised the topic of the groundwater monitoring network, stated the drinking water supply well field was nine miles from the location, and a network was in place that monitored salinity. He continued the issue was with the drain fields and having a high-water table and wanted to clarify they did not want to invest in a drinking water network. He stated currently there was no salinity intrusion, it was monitored monthly, and the problem was fighting JEA, their well field, and cone of depression.

Mr. Grant advised the Tree Canopy Enhancement Program was a huge success thanks to Commissioner Horvath, and they were conducting site visits to ensure the property was suitable for the tree, suggest alternates, or cancel participation, which should be completed in the next several weeks.

Mr. Grant mentioned the Internal Sustainability Program, and the following was discussed with the Commission:

- Glabra Skipp, Environmental Program Coordinator, brought internal City staff together for different program areas with lots of data monitored
- There were five program areas and several projects initiated to assist with reduction of carbon footprint, or sustainability and consumption
- Upcoming projects including research of purchasing residential compost bins comprised of 100% plastic injection molds
- Recognition program for businesses exercising sustainable practices:
 - Worked with Flagler graphics arts class and picked winner for marketing and branding
 - Worked with a local resident
 - Would farm this out to the Chamber and local business groups for feedback
 - City should partner with the City of St. Augustine Beach who shared similar visions and had a similar recognition program in the past
- Factor the reduction of carbon emission or congestion management in the awards criteria; however, calculating a carbon footprint production was onerous and some reduction items required a certain tier of carbon reduction benefits
- Water consumption, offering employees enhancements to carpool, using public transit, and asking patrons if they wanted water when seated were suggestions
- Mr. Grant recently met with the City Manager, Public Works Director, and Financial Director of the City of St. Augustine Beach to discuss partnership with projects such as the Tree Enhancement Program and recycling
- Recently hired an inspector for grease trap inspections, which were all inspected once, with larger traps inspected twice a year; however, restaurant schedules made this difficult
- Reduce necessity for business follow up by promoting sustainable business program, recycling, and education during inspection
- Several programs which assisted with environmental all tied together, helped reduce contaminants going into the stormwater system and intercoastal, and kept the sanitary sewer system in good health to avoid overflows and FDEP fines

Mr. Grant briefly reviewed the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) overall status summary.²

Commissioner Horvath acknowledged the amazing amount of work on the CIP list.

6. Additional General Public Comments Time Permitting

² Included with original Commission packet

Public comment was opened, and the Commission heard from the following member of the public:

- Ed Slavin

Public comment was closed.

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:42 P.M.³



Tracy Upchurch, MAYOR



Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK



³ Transcribed by Laura Morse