



**Board of Directors  
Meeting Minutes**

September 24, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. CT  
Pensacola City Council Chambers  
222 West Main Street, Pensacola, FL 32502

[Meeting Recording](#)

**Members Present**

Mike Kohler, Chair	Escambia County
Colten Wright, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Cherry Fitch	City of Gulf Breeze
Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach

**Members Absent**

None

**Interested Parties Present**

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Bailey Walkinshaw	PPBEP
Paige Lansky	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Jeff Helms	Moffatt & Nichol

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call** (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

Staff called the roll. A quorum was present.

**3. Approval of Board Agenda**

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the agenda. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**4. Approval of August 28, 2024, Board Minutes**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve the August 28, 2024, meeting minutes. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion



passed unanimously.

## 5. Staff Updates

### a. Director's Update (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

#### i. Introduction of New Staff Member

Staff welcomed the newest team member, Chloe Ray, filling the Environmental Technician role. Zach Schang will start Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Project Coordinator position.

#### ii. Florida Local Environmental Resource Agencies (FLERA) Annual Meeting

Staff participated in a panel at the annual FLERA Meeting to show how regional partnerships can help support water quality improvement, economic development, and community resilience. FLERA is a group that consists of local government staff and private sector representatives from across the state of Florida.

#### iii. Mobile Green Drinks

Staff gave a guest presentation about the Estuary Program at Mobile Green Drinks, which is a casual monthly gathering focused on environmental topics and networking.

#### iv. NOAA Meeting with The Nature Conservancy and City of Orange Beach

Weather dependent, staff are planning on meeting with partners from The Nature Conservancy, the City of Orange Beach, and NOAA leadership on lower Perdido Bay to discuss current and future restoration and conservation projects.

#### v. National Estuary Program (NEP) Designation

Staff are hoping for the NEP designation to be brought to the U.S. House of Representatives for vote before the end of the calendar year. Discussion was held on lobbyists and potential ways for supporting the push for the NEP designation to the U.S. House within the remaining three weeks.

#### vi. Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Design Kick-Off Meeting

Staff held a kick-off meeting with Jacobs Engineering and partners from The Nature Conservancy, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Santa Rosa County for the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative. Discussion was held on planning for the 10-year goal of restoring 1500 acres of oyster habitat and what the next 18 months looks like pertaining to the design process, hosting public engagement meetings, and learning from previous large-scale restoration projects from other groups. Staff will continue to provide updates every Board meeting until the project is in-water, which is anticipated in approximately two years.



**vii. Evening for the Estuaries Gala**

The second annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala will be held on October 17<sup>th</sup> from 6-9pm CST. Ticket sales and sponsorships have reached roughly \$20,000 with approximately 60 tickets sold. Staff set a goal of selling 100 tickets and want to have ticket sales secured by October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Staff thanked and recognized board members that have aided in silent auction donations while encouraging board members to reach out to staff for any last-minute auction item donations or sponsorships.

**b. Technical Update** (*Haley Gancel, Environmental Scientist*)

**i. Oyster Shell Recycling Program** (*Paige Lansky, Assistant Project Coordinator*)

Staff reported that the oyster shell recycling started on August 22<sup>nd</sup> and 15 tons of shell has already been collected in one month. Other shell recycling programs collect 15 tons of shell in one month from 10-15 restaurants, compared to the Estuary Program's 15 tons of shell in one month from only four restaurants which are Felix's, The Grand Marlin, Red Fish Blue Fish, and Peg Leg Pete's. Staff shared that the logo, messaging, and branding for the oyster shell recycling program has been finalized with Hatchmark and the new name for the recycling program is The Oyster Alliance.

**ii. C-STARS Living Shoreline Monitoring**

Staff are partnering with St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program for quarterly living shorelines monitoring. Staff and partners are monitoring ten living shorelines within the Pensacola Bay watershed and conducted the third quarter of sampling from July 28<sup>th</sup> through August 1<sup>st</sup>.

**iii. NAS Living Shoreline Seagrass Survey**

Staff assisted Escambia County with seagrass monitoring as part of the pre-installation seagrass survey requirement for the NAS Living Shoreline permit.

**iv. Seagrass Monitoring**

Staff will contract the University of Southern Mississippi to collect technical information such as species type, percent cover, shoot length, and algal density. Staff and partners have completed three years of seagrass monitoring and hope to continue the monitoring effort to observe changes and seagrass health through time. Staff anticipate going out with the USM team this month.

**v. NOAA RESTORE Science Program Long Term Trends in Gulf of Mexico**

Staff were strongly encouraged to submit a full proposal in the Letter of Intent feedback for the NOAA RESTORE Science Program Long-Term Trends in the Gulf of Mexico opportunity. Staff have since submitted the full proposal for Establishing a Long-Term Fisheries Independent Monitoring Program to Inform Fisheries Management Data Gaps in Northwest FL Estuaries.



vi. **Future Engagements**

1. **Oyster Sub-Committee Meeting**

Staff will hold the next Oyster Sub-Committee Meeting on October 31<sup>st</sup> from 10am-12pm CST to provide updates on the Oyster Restoration Initiative, including the kick-off meeting with Jacobs Engineering.

2. **Stakeholder Planning Workshop #1**

Staff are planning the first of at least two stakeholder planning workshops for the Oyster Restoration Initiative. The workshops will include a large group of approximately 80 people with varied backgrounds from stakeholders, oystermen, biologists, permitting experts, etc. to discuss and finalize areas for conceptual oyster habitat design templates.

c. **Outreach Update** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

i. **Seagrass Sleuths**

Staff held the last Summer Seagrass Sleuths event in July behind the Navarre Visitor Center on the Santa Rosa Sound. In August, staff hosted the Wild and Free of Northwest Florida homeschool group at Shoreline Park in Gulf Breeze.

ii. **Fall Volunteer Training**

Staff held a Critter Catcher volunteer training at Shoreline Park in Gulf Breeze to increase trained volunteers in preparation for upcoming Seagrass Sleuth field trip opportunities.

iii. **Nature on the Bay**

Staff gave a talk on nature and the Pensacola Bay watershed in July on the Pensacola Bay Ferry as part of their Nature on the Bay Program.

iv. **Trash Free Waters Film Screening**

Staff hosted the first premiere of the Trash Free Waters film at Odd Colony Brewing Co. in downtown Pensacola and hosted a Trash Trivia Night that followed the film premiere. The film was shared in the monthly main newsletter and is available on the Estuary Program's YouTube channel.

v. **Panhandle Manatee**

Kyna Finley, the 2024 Jessica Bibza Manatee Outreach Intern, is wrapping up her manatee outreach internship this Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup>. Over the duration of her internship, the Panhandle Manatee Program has distributed 733 boater kits, attended 55 events, interacted with 2,648 people and logged 120 hours from volunteers. Staff and the Board thanked Kyna for her hard work and dedication this past summer.

vi. **National Estuaries Week**



National Estuaries Week is September 21<sup>st</sup> to September 28<sup>th</sup>.

Staff kicked off National Estuaries Week by hosting a virtual Lunch and Learn with Florida Sea Grant on scallops, fish, and seagrass in Pensacola and Perdido Bays this past Monday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Lunch and Learn recording is available on the Estuary Program's YouTube channel.

The next event for National Estuaries Week will be held on September 24<sup>th</sup> at Alga Beer Company for a nature-themed trivia night with Alga's trivia host Ranger Brandon. Staff collaborated with Ranger Brandon on the trivia questions and will be tabling throughout the event. Trivia is free and there will be prizes for the top three teams.

Staff are still anticipating hosting the Community Grant Symposium this Thursday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, at the Bayview Community Center. The symposium will cover presentations from the 2023-2024 grant recipients and announce the 2024-2025 awardees.\*

Staff will end National Estuaries Week by tabling at Pensacola Seafood Festival in downtown Pensacola for all three days, Friday through Sunday, with OysterCorps members.

*\* The 2024 Community Grant Symposium was postponed due to anticipated Hurricane Helene impacts and city facility closures. The symposium is rescheduled for November 14, 2024, from 5:30-8:30pm CST at Bayview Community Center in Pensacola, Florida.*

## 6. Action Items

- a. **Approval of Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agreement No. L0099, in the amount of \$750,000, for the FY2024-2025 Legislative Appropriation**  
Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agreement No. L0099, in the amount of \$750,000, for the FY2024-2025 Legislative Appropriation. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  
- b. **Approval of Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agreement No. RES13, in the amount of \$2,200,000, for the Carpenter Creek Restoration Project**  
Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agreement No. RES13, in the amount of \$2,200,000, for the Carpenter Creek Restoration Project. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.



- c. **Approval of a Contract with Dauphin Island Sea Lab, in the amount of \$16,471.20, to complete the Annual Seagrass Fish Trawling Survey**  
Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a Contract with Dauphin Island Sea Lab, in the amount of \$16,471.20, to complete the Annual Seagrass Fish Trawling Survey. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  
- d. **Approval of a Contract Amendment with the University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$39,570, to complete the Annual Tier II Seagrass Monitoring**  
Staff confirmed that the data are compatible with Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's data and discussion was held on sampling locations and seagrass extent.  
  
Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a Contract Amendment with University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$39,570, to complete the Annual Tier II Seagrass Monitoring. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  
- e. **Ratifying Approval of Health Insurance Coverage Renewal with the Florida League of Cities**  
Discussion was held on the 7% increase in health insurance rates. Staff reached out to Florida Blue for comparable plans; however, premiums or deductibles would be substantially higher than the current plan. The increased cost is offset on the employer side, with an exception for the increase in monthly premiums for spouse, child, and family plans.  
  
Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to ratify approval of health insurance coverage renewal through the Florida League of Cities. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  
- f. **Final Approval of Proposed FY24-25 Operating Budget**  
Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the proposed FY24-25 Operating Budget. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## 7. Board/Agency Updates

- a. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) shared that there will be a Perdido Islands Restoration Meeting on September 25<sup>th</sup> and that the Sea, Sand, and Stars Environmental Learning Center was recently awarded approximately \$900,000, which will be used for making significant improvements to the center.
  
- b. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) recognized Okaloosa County for their recent land purchase near Baker as an expansion of Natural Resources into the North end of the county and thanked Commissioner Wright and Commissioner Smith as Santa Rosa County recently became an official partner with the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership.



**8. Public Comment**

None

**9. Adjourned**