



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. CT

City of Pensacola Council Chambers

Meeting Audio Recording Available Upon Request

Members Present

Colten Wright, Chair	Santa Rosa County
Tim Burr, Vice Chair	City of Gulf Breeze
Steve Stroberger	Escambia County
Mike Kohler	Escambia County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach
Ben Boutwell	Town of Century
Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Vernon Compton	City of Milton

Members Absent

Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
Robert Fenwick	Okaloosa County

Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Samantha Pitts	PPBEP
Sonya Negley	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Phelps & Dunbar
Daryl Boudreau	NWFWMD
Michelle Smith	FDACS
Hunter Stafford	Sea & Shoreline
Thomas Derbes	Florida Sea Grant

1. Call to Order

Chairman Wright called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm

2. Roll Call (Matt Posner, Executive Director)

Staff called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Public Comment

None

4. Approval of Board Agenda

Mr. Speed made a motion to approve the agenda as presented and Commissioner Kohler seconded the motion. With no objection, the Board accepted the agenda as presented.

5. Approval of April 15, 2026, Board Minutes

Mayor Boutwell made a motion to approve the meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Kohler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.



1. Presentation

a. Pensacola Bay Prohibited Shellfish Harvesting Area Classification Program

Michelle Smith, Environmental Administrator, Division of Aquaculture Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)

M. Smith provided an overview of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program, which establishes minimum requirements to regulate interstate commerce of shellfish. It protects public health by ensuring shellfish are harvested from properly classified waters and handled properly at all levels, from harvest to final sale. FDACS is required to resurvey harvesting areas at least every 12 years. Pensacola Bay was last surveyed in 2022, and that year the prohibited harvest areas were expanded due to poor water quality. Based on updated monitoring data collected from 2022-2026, the trends in bacteria across East and Escambia Bays are still not meeting standards and will remain closed. FDACS will continue to collect data and evaluate these areas for future classification changes. The map of conditionally approved and prohibited harvest areas and more information on this program are available on the FDACS website [here](#).

Discussion followed the presentation. Mr. Speed inquired about the process for re-opening prohibited harvest areas. Overall, the area would need to meet minimum standards to be reopened in the future. It is difficult to say now with certainty since FDACS will need to collect additional data. M. Smith mentioned that Big Lagoon is in the process of getting approved for harvest, and if approved, should open in 2026/2027.

Mr. Compton asked if FDACS tracks the source of fecal coliform (e.g., human or animal). M. Smith stated that FDACS does not conduct Microbial Source Tracking activities, so it is difficult to track back to the source. M. Posner and W. Scheffel indicated that PPBEP is currently implementing a DEP funded [Microbial Source Tracking project](#) in partnership with Escambia County. This project focuses on nine sub-basins that are impaired for bacteria and/or nutrients in the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. Mr. Compton also mentioned it was a great opportunity to fill data gaps and meet directives to improve water quality.

Councilman Burr inquired about Gulf Breeze having prohibited areas and if septic to sewer conversions would help with the issue. M. Smith indicated it could make an impact and ongoing data collection would be necessary for further determination.

2. Staff Updates

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

National Estuary Program Designation Update

On a recent trip to Tallahassee, M. Posner met with representatives from Florida Department of Environmental Protection and EPA in Tallahassee. He reviewed the 10-step process for NEP designation, which reflects an 8-month timeline from submitting the nomination package to having the initial grant awarded. M. Posner provided options for fast tracking a few steps in the process. Matt commented on the geographic scope overlap with the existing NEP boundary in Alabama, which will be addressed throughout the process. It will not preclude PPBEP from conducting work in Alabama but would limit the expenditure of NEP funds.



Councilman Burr inquired about the estimated amount of funding, which is currently \$800,000 annually, but there has been discussion on increasing the annual allocation to \$1.5 million for each NEP.

NOAA Visit

In late April, NOAA staff traveled to Pensacola to conduct site visits for NOAA funded projects led by PPBEP and partners. Jessica Black (NOAA) visited project sites including the newly constructed greenhouses in Orange Beach and at the Santa Rosa Band of Lower Muscogee's cultural center in west Pensacola. PPBEP staff and partners also provided project updates on the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, Lower Perdido Islands restoration, and the Living Shoreline Assistance Program.

Panhandle Estuarine Restoration Team (PERT) Meeting

M. Posner and Zach Schang (*PPBEP Project Coordinator, PERT Co-Chair*) participated in the 8th annual membership meeting of the Panhandle Estuarine Restoration Team (PERT) at Northwest Florida State College. Z. Schang delivered an opening address and presentation on an upcoming Living Shoreline General Permit. PERT's main function is to bring together regional expertise on restoration for networking and sharing best practices.

Gulf Conference hosted by the Gulf Alliance

PPBEP staff attended the Gulf Conference in Mobile, Alabama from May 5-8. Staff participated in conference workshops, team meetings, and presented on projects across several of the sessions.

Financial Update

The FY25 financial statements were presented to the Board for approval. Staff noted FY25 year-end financial statements are subject to change following the FY25 annual financial audit, and any such changes would be brought back to the Board for approval. Chairman Wright indicated that PPBEP will have the opportunity to create new efficiencies and procedures since bringing financial operations in-house.

Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the FY24-25 financial statements with the caveat that should FY25 financial statements be revised, they be brought back to the Board for approval. Mr. Compton seconded the motion. The motion to approve the financials passed unanimously.

b. Technical Update (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

SAV Mapping

In Fall 2025, PPBEP partnered with University of Southern Mississippi's Geospatial Center to acquire aerial and satellite imagery to produce updated benthic habitat maps with current seagrass extent for Pensacola and Perdido Bay Systems. The project will be completed by June and maps will be available soon after. The spatial dataset will be included in the 2027 State of the Bays report.

Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative - Bottom Mapping and Spat/Larval Monitoring

PPBEP in partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) have begun side-scan bottom mapping and ground truthing to determine which areas throughout East and Escambia Bays are suitable for oyster restoration. These data will help refine the



restoration design process for the Oyster Restoration Initiative.

On May 15th, PPBEP staff in partnership with EPA and OysterCorps deployed oyster spat arrays and started conducting larval plankton tows to evaluate the larval supply and recruitment potential across 10 sites in the PBS. This is a continuation of monitoring efforts from 2025.

Living Shoreline Assistance Program (LSAP)

The first reef build for Perdido has been completed. In addition, four Nationwide Permits (NWP) have been approved and two are pending. Upcoming installs will include volunteer opportunities. In the Pensacola watershed, staff hosted three open houses with 50 attendees. Staff have conducted site assessments for all properties and final site selection will be completed in June. Overall, 50 site assessments were completed, PPBEP trained 18 Oyster Corps members, and the team has engaged over 600 community members.

Carpenter Creek Restoration Project

PPBEP staff shared a short film by Lensea Films about the ongoing Carpenter Creek Restoration efforts. There have been over 130 access agreements signed to support field assessments and the project team have been working on data collection and planning future community engagement opportunities including listening sessions and public access workshops.

Sedimentation Prioritization Action Plan

PPBEP is partnering with JMT to document erosion issues submitted by stakeholders and to develop a model to evaluate major sediment inputs throughout the Pensacola Bay watershed. The team will conduct field assessments along upper watershed tributaries and throughout Blackwater and East Bay to inform the future development of a project prioritization matrix to address and remediate sediment inputs that could impact future restoration of our bays.

c. Outreach Update (*Samantha Pitts, Education and Outreach Program Manager*)

Public Programs and Community Engagement

PPBEP staff shared that with the arrival of summer, the Outreach and Education team is preparing for the return of Seagrass Sleuths. Two public programs are currently scheduled, along with additional program dates planned in partnership with the City of Pensacola summer camps.

The PPBEP intern has been actively representing the organization at community festivals and has a full schedule of upcoming library programs and Panhandle Manatee tabling events throughout the summer.

Community Partnerships and Fundraising Events

PPBEP staff highlighted two new community partnerships that provided support for PPBEP programs. Kendra Scott Jewelry hosted a Give-Back event at its Pensacola location, donating a portion of sales proceeds to PPBEP. The event raised \$450 in two hours.

Additionally, the PPBEP intern coordinated a donation event with Disko Lemonade Yoga Studio at Bayview Park, which raised \$500 to support the Panhandle Manatee Program.



Education and Outreach Committee Engagement

PPBEP staff shared that the Education and Outreach Committee social event at Alga Brewery was well attended and provided opportunity for committee members to connect in an informal setting.

Habitat Restoration Outreach

On May 1st and 2nd, PPBEP staff assisted Escambia County with the White Island planting event. The effort was supported through funding from the Alabama Coastal Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, with additional support from OysterCorps, NAS Pensacola, and Davenport Bayou homeowners. Approximately 2,500 plants were planted during the restoration effort.

Community Science Initiatives

PPBEP staff provided an update on the Eyes on Seagrass program, a community science initiative that PPBEP recently transitioned from the University of West Florida and Florida Sea Grant. The program engaged community volunteers in monitoring seagrass beds in Santa Rosa Sounds and Big Lagoon State Park.

PPBEP staff held the first volunteer training on May 2nd, welcoming 16 new and returning volunteers. Trained volunteers will support ongoing seagrass monitoring efforts and contribute valuable data to inform understanding of local seagrass habitats.

Volunteer Training and Support

PPBEP staff held the first Critter Catcher training of the year at Shoreline Park in Gulf Breeze. Newly trained volunteers will support Seagrass Sleuths programming and other education initiatives throughout the year.

3. Action Items

a. Approval of a Memorandum of Understanding between PPBEP and the Northwest Florida Water Management District for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative

Recommend the Board approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a Memorandum of Understanding between PPBEP and the Northwest Florida Water Management District for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative.

Mayor Boutwell made a motion to approve. Councilman Burr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Ratify Approval of the Revised Subaward Agreement Between PPBEP and Escambia County, in the Amount of \$33,000, for the Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative Network

Recommend the Board ratify approval of the revised Subaward Agreement between PPBEP and Escambia County, in the amount of \$33,000 for the Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative Network.

Commissioner Kohler made a motion to ratify approval. Mayor Boutwell seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Board Updates

None



5. Public Comment

None

6. Adjourn

Chairman Wright adjourned the meeting at 2:37 pm.