



Board of Directors Minutes

August 16, 2023, at 1:30 p.m. CT

Pensacola Council Chambers

222 W Main St., Pensacola, FL 32502

[Meeting Recording](#)

Members Present

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

Members Absent

Robert Bender	Escambia County
Benjamin Boutwell	Town of Century

Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Madi Ross	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Barbara Albrecht	BFA
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Darryl Boudreau	NFWFMD
Kyle Buck	EPA
Steve Dewcos	Community Member
Casey Fulford	AACD
Tanya Linzy	Santa Rosa County
Paul Looney	WRA
Josh Smith	City of Gulf Breeze
Chris Verlinde	Santa Rosa County



1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Matt Posner (Director, PPBEP) called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Approval of Board Agenda

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the agenda. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of May 17, 2023, Board of Directors Minutes

Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) made a motion to approve the May 17, 2023, Board of Directors minutes. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Staff Updates

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

i. **PPBEP Organizational Transition**

An update on the continuation of the PPBEP Organization Transition was provided to the Board. The Program has already accomplished registering the corporation, applying for an EIN, and establishing interim banking services. Upon Board approval, PPBEP plans to have the operations and procurement procedures manual, office lease transition, MOU for transition between PPBEP and Escambia County, non-profit filing with the IRS, and the employee benefits plan approved to continue for final action. Final tasks before transition on October 1, 2023 include procurement of permanent banking and accounting services, obtaining liability insurance, the update of employment contracts, approval of employee and grants management manuals, and the transition of funds and employees approved and completed.

ii. **Grant Updates**

PPBEP's Appropriation Request sponsored by Senator Broxson and Representative Andrade was approved in the final Senate budget for the full amount of \$700,000. An additional \$250,000 will be awarded to PPBEP through the Northwest Florida Water Quality Improvement Project.

An update was provided on the NOAA Regional Resilience Challenge Grant opportunity. A letter of intent for projects within the Program's watersheds is being drafted and will be distributed soon.

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

i. **Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative**

PPBEP, The Nature Conservancy, Santa Rosa County, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Department of Environmental Protection held a kickoff meeting earlier this summer for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration



Initiative which will focus on the implementation of the Oyster Fisheries and Habitat Management Plan and related actions from the CCMP. The project has a phased approach to fund the design and permitting for 600 ha (1,482 acres) of oyster habitat restoration, with the implementation of up to 100 ha (247 acres). The project team discussed the regulatory process, the design RFP, construction, and community engagement. The official project start date is September 1st.

ii. Water Quality Monitoring for Oysters

Brandon Smith with Grayson Bay Oyster Company requested water quality monitoring support at his farm to assess the status of his oysters and changing water quality variables. PPBEP deployed data loggers at Grayson Bay Oyster Company's farm in June. The data loggers are measuring surface and bottom conductivity and dissolved oxygen every 15 minutes. Data are download every 2-3 weeks. B. Smith is also collecting phytoplankton and water quality samples with UF (data are available [here](#)).

iii. Oyster Habitat Suitability Model

PPBEP is updating the Oyster Habitat Suitability Model (HSM) developed by TNC in 2021. The updated model will include new indicators (i.e., chlorophyll-a and turbidity) and updating current indicators with more recent data from the Water Quality Portal and Watershed Information Network. The updated HSM will be used to inform site selection for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative. The model update is anticipated to be complete by the end of fall 2023.

iv. Assessing Restoration Success Across Panhandle Estuaries

St. Andrew & St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP), PPBEP, Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program (CBEP), Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association (SABRMA), and TNC were awarded a three-year, \$1.2 million Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program (FLRACEP) grant to evaluate the effectiveness of multiple living shoreline restoration projects across three Florida panhandle estuaries, including the Pensacola Bay System. The project will officially kick off this fall. SASJBEP is currently hiring a post-doc and a technician, and the project team is finalizing sites across the panhandle. PPBEP will oversee 10 sites within the Pensacola Bay System. Data collection will start in spring 2024.

v. UF CCS/SAS Water Quality Improvement

During 2022-2023, University of Florida Center for Coastal Solutions (UF CCS) was the lead for the SAS project sponsored by Senator Broxson. UF CCS developed a variety of tools for stakeholders in the Panhandle region to inform projects related to large-scale water quality improvements. On June 14th,



2023, UF CCS, CBA, Florida Sea Grant, and PPBEP held a living shorelines workshop in Destin, FL to discuss strategies towards a region-wide living shoreline implementation strategy. Discussion was held on priority locations for living shorelines and policy changes to the permitting language.

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

i. **NOAA B-WET Grant**

Staff provided an update on PPBEP's NOAA Bay-Watershed Education & Training (B-WET) Program grant. The project kicked off with a weeklong teacher professional development workshop in June where teachers from Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa County high schools participated in hands-on activities, field trips, and guest presentations about the status of local oysters in the Pensacola Bay area.

Implementation of the oyster curriculum will begin in the fall for Pensacola, West Florida, Gulf Breeze, Navarre, and Fort Walton Beach high schools. The curriculum includes the incorporation of student investigations, field and lab experiences, local case studies, and student action projects.

After the 2023-2024 school year, a project evaluation for the students and teachers will be administered. This will allow for lesson refinement and the opportunity to distribute the lessons to other teachers and schools and submission to NOAA for inclusion in their educational resources portal.

ii. **The Humble Oyster**

The Humble Oyster documentary that explores the past, current, and future conditions of oysters in the Pensacola Bay System was completed and premiered at WSRE in May. An accompanying in-Studio episode further explains the history and conditions of local oysters.

[The Humble Oyster](#)

[In-Studio: Hope on the Half Shell](#)

iii. **Outreach Events**

A highlight of the Program's Summer Outreach was shared with the Board. Staff participated in Military Appreciation Day at the Blue Angel Recreation Area, Pensacola Beach Sea Turtle Baby Shower, Perdido Key's World's Ocean Day, Gallery Night, and Palafox Market. A volunteer training was held for the PPBEP Critter Catchers volunteers and PPBEP partnered with Gulf Islands National Park Service (NPS) and Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) to host a Seagrass Kayak Tour at Naval Live Oaks.

iv. **Trash Free Waters** (*Molly McDaniel, Resilience Intern*)

The Clean Campus project is a collaboration with faculty members and students from West Florida and Gulf Breeze High Schools that have completed the Trash Free Waters curriculum and campus clean-up case studies. Using the



data collected from their clean-ups, students developed strategies to reduce and prevent litter on their campus. Funding will be used to support the purchase of gear for student-led clean-ups, additional receptacles for problem areas, a water bottle filling station, and other elements to incentivize stewardship and promote a clean, trash free campus. Supplies will be distributed to the participating schools later this Fall.

v. **Community Grant Updates** (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

1. Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District No-Till Seed Drill Rental Program

Blackwater Soil & Water Conservation District successfully purchased a No-Till Seed Drill that will be used by local farmers as part of an ongoing equipment rental program. Using the drill will increase the implementation of valuable conservation practices like conservation tillage, cover crop, and pasture renovation. These practices will help reduce soil loss from farm fields, reduce sedimentation into local waterways, and reduce the need for fertilizers resulting in less nutrient runoff into local waterways. The use of this drill for farming practices estimates 2.5 – 3 tons of soil saved per acre. Two local farmers have already rented out the drill.

2. Escambia County Coastal Landscaping Workshop and Plant Giveaway

Escambia County, Escambia Extension, and the Florida Master Gardeners held four Coastal landscaping workshops in February & March with two large-scale public giveaways in April. The Coastal Landscaping Guide was updated to include more general landscape information and an expanded plant list, along with a Native Nursery & Landscaper insert. Two additional volunteer workdays at the Perdido Key Coastal Demonstration Garden served to increase awareness about the workshops and provide additional learning opportunities for workshop attendees. Escambia County also worked closely with the Native Plant Company to provide a wider range of plants available at the giveaways. Staff conducted outreach to six local nurseries to, four of which stock a selection of coastal native species, with more available by special order. A total of 300 people were reached through the workshops and giveaways, with 1200 native plants given away to local residents.

3. Franklin's Promise EscaRosa OysterCorps

The EscaRosa OysterCorps produced a total of 41,680 lbs. of shells collected from participating local restaurants to be used for restoration efforts, constructed a total of 215 oyster prisms, and harvested 5,960 *Spartina alterniflora*, smooth cordgrass plants and 6,300 *Spartina patens*, saltmeadow cordgrass plants. The team gained 3,156.5 hours of field



experience per member and received 569.5 total hours of training and professional development.

4. Navarre Beach Marine Science Station Aquatic Care Team

The primary objectives of the project include Aquatic Care Team students learning about factors that impact water quality in our watershed, teaching younger students about water quality, learning how to use scientific equipment, follow protocols, and input data, communicating findings to larger audiences, and take on leadership roles at the Navarre Beach Marine Science Station. Students took biweekly sampling at six target sites totaling 36 individual samples that include water temperature, salinity, conductivity, nutrients, and turbidity. The Aquatic Care Team reached over 1,700 younger students through field trips and other outreach. Students showed a 20% increase in watershed knowledge and a 15% increase in knowledge of water quality testing and parameters.

5. National Wildlife Federation Manatees and Meadows Program

The goal of this program was to promote awareness, education, and protection for manatees and seagrass by conducting outreach with target audiences in the field. Teams of trained interns and volunteers visited boat ramps, marinas, fishing piers, water-based businesses, schools, distributing outreach materials and speaking to diverse audiences. The group spoke to anglers, boaters, residents, and visitors and distributed outreach materials such as magnets, stickers, and rack cards. Boater's Kits which included polarized sunglasses, koozies, Boater's Guides, and magnets or stickers were distributed throughout the region. Four volunteer trainings were held bringing onboard 58 total trained volunteers. The volunteers reached over 900 people through outreach. Over the term of the project, a total of 98 manatee sightings were reported.

6. Northwest Florida State College Peripheral Oyster Mapping in Santa Rosa Sound and Urban Bayous of Pensacola Bay

Peripheral oyster abundance was visually assessed using a coding system that denoted relative abundance and condition of live vs dead oysters on approximately 20% of all marsh, seawall, rip rap, and boat docks within Santa Rosa Sound, as well as all major bridges and boat ramps. A total of 302 sites were assessed throughout Santa Rosa Sound (excluding residential canals). At each site the type of substrate was recorded, oyster presence and condition were coded, maximum depth, and water parameters that include temperature, conductivity, salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH, and turbidity were recorded at the surface and the bottom. A



video was taken at multiple points for each site from the surface to the bottom in 0.5 m intervals. The results of the video analysis will be sent soon in a more detailed report. Bayou Grande assessment was delayed due to weather conditions but will be coming soon.

7. University of West Florida Streambank Erosion in the Pensacola Bay and Perdido Bay Watersheds

Data was collected at 20 previously established sites in the Pensacola Bay watershed and 10 new sites in the Perdido Bay watershed were established. The baseline data are crucial for the management of sediment issues in the bays and to prioritize stream areas for restoration. This project has established a database for long-term monitoring of streambank erosion in the watersheds.

8. University of West Florida Zooplankton Ecology and Water Quality Monitoring of Perdido Bay

Water quality and plankton samples were collected at the 20 sites monthly from October 2022 – April 2023. At each location, a measurement of water clarity, temperature, salinity, conductivity, total phosphorus, total nitrogen, total suspended solids, ammonium, chlorophyll-a, dissolved oxygen concentration, dissolved oxygen percent saturation, pH, and turbidity were collected. Surface and bottom samples were collected and preserved for zooplankton analysis. In addition to the parameters outlined in the grant proposal, true color for both surface and bottom samples was collected and analyzed, and surface water samples were collected for analysis of the phytoplankton community using Flow-Cam. UWF has secured additional support to continue this monitoring for a full year (October 2022 – September 2023) and a more detailed report that will cover the full study will be submitted to PPBEP at the end of the study.

vi. Community Grant Symposium (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

The Community Grant Symposium will include presentations from our previous grant awardees and the announcement of our newly awarded Community Grant recipients.

SAVE THE DATE:

3rd Annual PPBEP Community Grant Symposium

September 22, 2023

5:30 – 8:30 PM

Bayview Community Center, Pensacola, FL

[Register](#)



6. Action Items

a. **Approval of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners and Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc.**

Since its formation in 2018, the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners has served as the host agency and fiscal agent for PPBEP. The PPBEP Board has determined that it would be advantageous to establish an independent entity to carry out the mission of the Estuary Program as the Program continues to grow. On May 18, 2023, the Estuary Program was reorganized as a Florida not-for-profit corporation operating as an instrumentality of government known as Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc. The purpose of the MOA is to outline the transition of administrative and financial services from the County to the Estuary Program Corporation to be completed by October 1, 2023.

Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) made a motion to approve the MOA between Escambia County Board of County Commissioners and Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. **Approval of a Lease Agreement with Empire Partners, LLC**

The PPBEP office has been located on the 5th floor of Seville Tower at 226 Palafox Place since December 2021. The original lease designated Escambia County as the lessee as the County has served as the host and fiscal agent for PPBEP since 2018. The office lease between Empire Partners and the County expired on July 31, 2023. A new lease has been drafted with Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc. serving as the lessee since PPBEP will become independent on October 1, 2023. The market rate for the subject office space is \$84,000 per year, or \$6,000 per month. Empire Partners has provided a generous inkind donation, in the amount of \$42,000 per year.

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the lease agreement with Empire Partners, LLC pending the correction of the lease agreement to show the discounted amount of \$42,000. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. **Approval of the Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program Operating and Procurement Procedures Manual**

As PPBEP transitions into an independent entity, PPBEP is required to establish policies and procedures to ensure appropriate checks and balances are in place. The Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program Operating and Procurement Procedures Manual establishes financial management and procurement policies for the Program. This Operating Manual is based on the Indian River Lagoon Council and Tampa Bay Estuary Program Operating Manuals.

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program Operating and Procurement Procedures Manual. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. **Approval of 501(c)(3) Tax Exemption Determination Application**

At the May 2023 Board of Directors meeting, the Board directed staff to prepare an



application for 501(c)(3) tax exemption determination.

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the designation of Ms. Mary Jane Bass to serve as Power of Attorney and Representative to submit the 501(c)(3) Tax Exemption Determination Application to the IRS. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. **Approval of a Health Insurance Coverage Plan with the Florida League of Cities**

Employee health insurance has been provided by Florida Blue through Escambia County since the Program was established. As the Program becomes independent on October 1, 2023, the Program was required to seek other health insurance providers. The Florida League of Cities/Florida Municipal Insurance Trust offers a competitive health insurance plan through United Health. Staff is recommending United Healthcare Choice Plus HSA Plan 5. This plan, out of the three provided by the League, offers the greatest benefits to the employees while balancing the costs borne by the Program. Staff is also recommending the following:

- a. Propose covering 100% of employee premiums
- b. Propose covering 50% of spouse/family premiums
- c. Propose contributing \$1,000 to each employee's deductible
- d. Propose contributing 75% of dental premium for the employee only
- e. Vision is voluntary and will be up to the individual employee to cover
- f. Propose covering \$10,000 in basic life and AD&D insurance

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to approve the health insurance coverage plan with the Florida League of Cities. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

f. **Approval of the Proposed FY23-24 Operating Budget**

The FY23-24 Operating Budget includes local government contributions, equipment expenditure, staff salary, and the office lease as major items. The budget was estimated using insight from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and India River Lagoon Estuary Program's current operating budgets.

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the FY23-24 Operating Budget. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

g. **Approval of the Revised Services Agreement with FSU, in the amount of \$475,000, to complete Compound Flood Modeling**

At the October 26, 2022 Board Meeting, the Board approved a services Agreement with Florida State University to complete compound flood modeling associated with the FDEP Resilient Florida grant. Revisions to the scope of work were made following consultation with FDEP. This revised agreement supersedes the previously adopted Services Agreement.

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the revised Services Agreement with FSU, in the amount of \$475,000, to complete Compound Flood Modeling.



Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

h. **Approval of a Services Agreement with UWF, in the amount of \$10,000, for the NOAA B-WET Project**

The Board previously approved NOAA B-WET Grant Agreement No. NA22NMF0080234, in the amount of \$100,000. The amended services agreement directs \$10,000 to the University of West Florida to complete the scope of work associated with the project, which entails completing teacher and student surveys and evaluation reports.

Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) made a motion to approve the Services Agreement with UWF, in the amount of \$10,000, for the NOAA B-WET Project. Commissioner Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Committee Updates

a. **Technical Committee** (*Paul Looney, WRA*)

At the August 15, 2023 Technical Committee meeting, Amy Mixon (AECOM) and Paul Looney (WRA) presented on the Bayou Chico Sediment Remediation Project. The major findings from the presentation include: most contaminants were found in the first foot or two of the sediments, PCBs, PAHs, and metals were generally below detection and the levels were lower than the 2005 study levels, and Dioxin levels continue to be concerning and the levels have not changed based off the 2005 study levels. The committee also discussed the planning and logistics behind hosting a Comprehensive Monitoring Implementation Workshop and the future Technical Committee engagement goals.

i. **Oyster Subcommittee** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

At the March 30, 2023 Oyster Subcommittee meeting, a presentation was held on the Pensacola Bay Oyster Initiative Project. A discussion was held on major project topics including spat on shell techniques, restoration objectives, and knowledge and data gaps.

b. **Education and Outreach Committee** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

At the August 10, 2023 Education and Outreach Committee Meeting, an update of the summer education and outreach activities was presented giving detail on the status of the NOAA B-WET Program and the teacher workshop. Staff and committee members discussed the upcoming Evening for the Estuaries Gala and possible silent auction donation item, Escambia County Bay Day, and Trash Free Waters project videos of Pond, Carpenter, and Jones Creek.

c. **Environmental Justice Committee** (*Molly McDaniel, Resilience Intern*)

The next Environmental Justice Committee Meeting will be held virtually on August 29, 2023 from 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM.

[Register](#)



8. Board/Agency Updates

9. Public Comment

10. Adjourned