



MINUTES
PPBEP Policy Board

March 11th, 2020

1:30-3:30 p.m.

Gulf Breeze Community Center
800 Shoreline Dr, Gulf Breeze Fl 32561

Members Present

Doug Underhill, Chair	Escambia County
Dave Piech, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Robert Bender	Escambia County
Ann Hill	City of Pensacola
Alex Fogg	Okaloosa County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach
Henry Hawkins	Town of Century
Bob Cole (ph)	Santa Rosa County
Peggi Smith (ph)	City of Milton

Members Absent

Billie Jo Underwood	Baldwin County
J.B. Schluter	City of Gulf Breeze

Agencies and Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP	Carrie Stevenson	UF/IFAS Extension
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP	Shelley Alexanders	Santa Rosa County
Jessica Bibza	NWF	Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Kristin Bennet	TetraTech	Amanda Rice	City of Milton
Casey Fulford	AACD	Jeanette Kelson	Wood PLC
Bill Short	Am-Pres	Barbara Albrecht	AIMS/BFA/PNA
Amy Paulson	ESA	Mark Berte (ph)	ACF
Chris Verlinde	UF/IFAS Extension	Samantha Bolduc	Escambia County

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

3. Trash Free Waters Award Announcement

Chair Underhill congratulated staff on securing the award from EPA's Trash Free Water funding opportunity. Ms. Bolduc thanked the partners and committee members who helped with the proposal development.

4. Approval of January 16th, 2020 PPBEP Policy Board Minutes

Councilwoman Hill made a motion to approve the January 16th meeting minutes. Mayor Hawkins seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Staff Update

a. Welcome PPBEP Senior Scientist

Mr. Posner welcomed the program's new Senior Scientist, Whitney Scheffel.

b. NACo Interim Policy Resolution

The National Association of Counties held their 2020 Legislative Conference the previous week, at which Commissioner Cole presented the following Interim Policy resolution to the Energy, Land Use, and Environment Subcommittee:

"The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to designate the Pensacola Bay System and Perdido Bay System as estuaries of national significance, and by extension recognize the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program as a National Estuary Program (NEP), per Section 320 of the Clean Water Act. Furthermore, NACo urges the federal government to achieve a funding level to continue the NEP to all counties that meet a locally-significant start up program."

The resolution passed unanimously. Com. Bender thanked Com. Cole for his effort on behalf of the program. Com. Bender also met with Senator Scott and Representative Gaetz in support of HB 4044/SB 3731, which would reopen the National Estuary Program and increase the program's funding to \$50 million annually. Both are supportive of the bill, but Governor Desantis' support is needed before moving forward. Mr. Posner stated FDEP Secretary Valenstein is also supportive of the effort and will be providing a letter of support to the Governor's office in the coming weeks.

c. Legislative Appropriations Request

As of Monday March 9th, the program's Appropriations Request was still in play. The Senate proposed the full \$250,000, while the House had proposed \$150,000 and the bill had been turned over to the Appropriation Committee Chairs for final deliberations. Mr. Posner thanked Garret Wallace of The Nature Conservancy for his efforts on behalf of all three panhandle estuary programs this legislative session.

d. Partnership with EPA NARS program-NCCA

The EPA's National Aquatic Resource Survey (NARS) is a reoccurring survey of water quality conditions made up of four surveys that rotate on a five-year basis. The National Coastal Conditions Assessment (NCCA) will take place this year and staff would like to use the data collected as a basis for the program's first State of the Bays report. For a statistically significant "snapshot" of the bays, EPA statisticians recommended 30 sites in total. EPA Region 4 currently samples 7 different stations within the Pensacola and Perdido bay systems. In support of the program's CCMP development, Region 4 has offered to cover an additional 10 water quality sample sites within the area. PPBEP staff and partners are currently pursuing funding and resources for the remaining 13 samples. Funds are available within the program's monitoring budget line, as well as through partnerships with the EPA Gulf Ecology lab in Gulf Breeze and Escambia County's Water Quality lab. General discussion followed.

Councilwoman Hill asked when staff expects to complete the State of the Bay report. Mr. Posner anticipates the report to be ready by early 2021.

e. Office Space

Commissioner Bender stated that the downtown Escambia County offices remain an option. He and Administrator Gilley are working with the current tenants to find suitable office space elsewhere. While hopeful arrangements can be found, Com. Bender doesn't anticipate having the space available until the end of April.

f. 2019-2020 Expense Report (Year to Date)

Mr. Posner presented the current expense report for the Board's review. Mr. Posner anticipates more expenditures in coming weeks with regards to outreach supplies and monitoring efforts, but all within budget.

g. Panhandle Estuarine Restoration Team

The 2nd Annual PERT meeting was held last week in Camp Helen State Park. PERT serves as a forum for restoration professionals and practitioners to come together and discuss and share ideas. Mr. Posner and many program partners attended and will continue to collaborate with restoration efforts in the future.

6. Update

a. Community Engagement through Environmental Science Class progress

Chasidy Hobbs, UWF

Chasidy Hobbs, UWF, has six undergraduates enrolled in the CEES class and has partnered with PPBEP to provide them hands-on experience with community engagement activities and strategies. As a class, they are developing a storm-drain marking tool kit to highlight the drains' connectivity to the bay(s). Their toolkit will include all the supplies and procedures required for the marking, location prioritization, and costs for future/expanded marking efforts. As a class, they hope to be able to mark at least one storm drain in each represented municipality before the end of the semester. The class was awarded an internal grant of \$5,000 to put towards the project. Each student is also responsible for an individual project designed to help meet the outreach and education priorities of the program:

- Social Media Strategy for the remainder of 2020, with a focus on highlighting GOMA's Embrace the Gulf 2020 and National Estuaries Week
- Development of public facing content for use on a website & newsletter template
- Development of a photo gallery for use on social media
- Creating and collecting relevant lesson plans and activities for outreach events
- Embrace the Gulf event on/around Earth Day (April 22nd)

Students are also reaching out to National Estuary Programs to interview staff and gather information and insights on other NEP community outreach and education efforts. General discussion followed. It was decided the Board should authorize Mr. Posner to move ahead with standing up a website and related expenditures.

Commissioner Cole made a motion to authorize the Interim Direction to stand up the website, with expenditures to not exceed \$3,000. Mr. Woody Speed seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Discussion Items

a. 2020-2021 Local Government Contributions

Mr. Posner requested board approval to move forward with discussions with member organizations regarding financial contributions for FY21. Chair Underhill directed staff to meet with each member organization one-on-one. Councilwoman Hill asked that staff stress the importance of longevity of contributions, due to the grant's limited lifespan.

b. Florida Legislative Recap

Mr. Posner quickly reviewed relevant 2020 legislation.

- HB 637 & SB 1066 Impact Fees- Passed
- SB 1232 & HB 913 Florida Climate and Resiliency Research Program -Died in Committee
- SB 690 & HB 147 Water Resources- Died in Committee
- HB 791 & SB 1608 Florida National Estuary Program Act- Withdrawn
- SB 1450 & HB 1091 Environmental Enforcement -Passed
- SB 712 & HB 1343 Water Quality Improvements-Passed

c. Executive Director Selection process

Commissioner Cole put the option of appointing Matt Posner as Executive Director, effectively immediately, before the board. General discussion followed. Chair Underhill and Com. Bender expressed concerns about Escambia County's HR's policies and the optics of skipping the competitive vetting process. Councilwoman Hill expressed concern over the length of the initial Director selection process.

Councilwoman Hill made a motion to appoint the interim Mr. Posner as permanent Executive Director, conduct a straw poll of seated Policy Board members to gauge Board approval and direct Ms. Bolduc to check the legality of the motion with Escambia County HR. Mayor Hawkins seconded the motion.

Chair Underhill stated he would not support the motion due to the optics of ignoring the competitive vetting process and that with Mr. Posner acting as Interim Executive Director, the program would continue to move forward at the same pace it is now, allowing the full process to take place and protecting both the program and Mr. Posner's reputation. Mr. Posner stated he would prefer to let the competitive vetting process move forward and would like the best candidate to be selected.

Councilwoman Hill rescinded her motion and it was decided to continue forward with the competitive vetting process.

As Mr. Posner plans to apply for the position, Ms. Bolduc and Ms. Scheffel will be organizing the Selection Committee and day-to-day communications with Escambia County HR. Ms. Bolduc requested any changes to the selection process from the Board. It was decided that a new selection committee should be formed, with the same organizational make-

up, but different appointees. Ms. Bolduc will bring the new selection committee back to the Board at the next meeting.

8. Committee Updates

a. Technical Committee Update

Jessica Bibza, NWF and Technical Committee Chair, quickly reviewed the Technical Committee meeting held earlier that day. The committee discussed the NCCA program, and identified additional indicators that may not have been included within the NCCA parameters that would help define the State of the Bays; including seagrass and oyster distribution, upland land use and land cover and key species abundance and density. The Committee also decided before the program could ask for input on key indicators from the general public, context would need to be given, including the role each indicator plays within the ecosystem and the thresholds for “good” and “bad” scores.

The committee also discussed the FLRACEP project, led by Dr. Deitch of UF/IFAS & Dr. Caffery of UWF. The funding has been approved and the Work Plan has been updated to reflect the new start dates. A smaller working group meeting was planned to begin drilling down into the details of Work Plan assignments. Committee members and staff will also be working with NOAA staff with regards to the Council Monitoring & Assessment Project (CMAP) that will be completed soon to tease out information related to monitoring and mapping efforts within the Pensacola and Perdido Bays systems.

The Committee continues to look for ways to get involved with ongoing efforts within the community, including the upcoming Living Shorelines Contractor Training Course, which will be taught at the Institute of Human & Machine Cognition April 15th and 16th. The committee is also interested in getting involved with the reporting and recording of manatee sightings as they increase in our coastal waters.

Councilwoman Hill questioned how the committee planned to educate the public about various indicators and stressors within the system. Chair Bibza mentioned that the earlier activity was a preliminary exercise, however much larger stakeholder engagement efforts are included within the workplan and will be a priority for the Community Outreach Coordinator once they come on board. Chair Underhill asked that Mr. Posner work with county staff to get a list of marine contractors in the area for the LSL Training Course and put out a press release to increase participation. Chair Underhill also asked for *Vibrio* to be included within the list of indicators to be highlighted and discussed with future public engagement efforts.

b. Education Committee Update

Carrie Stevenson, UF/IFAS Extension and Education Committee Co-Chair, briefly updated the Board on Education Committee efforts. While the committee has not met, committee members have been working with staff to hire the Community Outreach Coordinator. The position will be re-advertised after initial negotiations with the top candidate did not result in their acceptance of the position. The position is currently posted on the Escambia County job website. Despite not having staff on board, committee members and staff are moving forward with education and outreach efforts. The 20th annual Santa Rosa County Seagrass Awareness Festival was the previous week and reached 150 students. March

27th and 28th is the Gulf Coast Science Festival and Escambia County Bay-Day joint event (since post-poned), and Santa Rosa County Bay Day is planned for May 14th. In support of GOMA's Embrace the Gulf event, Paddle Florida. and partners are organizing a 5-night paddle trip down the Perdido River in mid-April. The program will also be participating in EPA Gulf Ecology Lab Earth Day Festival on April 25th.

Chair Underhill would like to discuss sponsoring a prize or incentive for the paddler that collects the most trash or debris each night with his District 2 discretionary funds. Com. Bender mentioned other Embrace the Gulf event ideas he would like to see implemented in the area such as a derelict crab trap and ghost fishing net blitz and other large debris clean-ups.

c. Business Partnership Update

Mr. Posner stated the first Business Partnership Committee meeting will be in late April. The Committee will remain open to the public, however targeted industries and business will be invited to participate. Staff hopes to bring an update back to the Board for their May meeting.

9. Policy Board/Agency Updates

There were no updates.

10. Public Comment

- Shelley Alexander, Santa Rosa County, stated that the County's grant department would be pursuing BOCC approval for submittal of a NFWF Coastal Resiliency Fund pre-proposal and would like to collaborate with the PPBEP. The agenda item needs to be submitted by next Wednesday March 18th, for BOCC approval. General Policy Board approval followed. Mr. Posner announced that he and Shelley would be in the field with FWC next week as they piloted a habitat prioritization restoration tool on Blackwater and Yellow Rivers (since postponed).

11. Adjourn

Chair Underhill thanked staff and committee members for their continued efforts and dedication to the program. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.