

**AMENDED
MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA
FEBRUARY 8, 2010
(10:00 A.M.)**

Proceedings of a special meeting of the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida, held at the Flagler College Ringhaver Student Services Center, Virginia Room, 50 Sevilla Street, St. Augustine, Florida.

Proof of publication of the notice of public hearing regarding the meeting with Congressman John Mica, the City of St. Augustine Commission, the St. Augustine Beach Commission, and the Hastings Town Commission for a Legislative Session update and funding allocations, was received, having been published in *The St. Augustine Record* on February 5, 2010.

Present were: Ron Sanchez, District 2, Chair
Ken Bryan, District 5, Vice Chair
Cyndi Stevenson, District 1
Ray Quinn, District 3
Phillip Mays, District 4
Michael D. Wanchick, County Administrator
Jerry Cameron, Assistant County Administrator
Darrell Locklear, Assistant County Administrator
Patrick McCormack, County Attorney
Michael Hunt, Deputy County Attorney
Terry Bulla, Deputy Clerk

Also present: John Mica, US Congressman
Dr. Bill Proctor, House District 20
Joe Boles, Mayor City of St. Augustine
Erroll Jones, Vice Mayor City of St. Augustine
Leanna Freeman, Commissioner City of St. Augustine
Don Crichlow, Commissioner City of St. Augustine
Nancy Sikes-Kline, Commissioner City of St. Augustine
William B. Harriss, City Manager
Brud Helhoski, Mayor City of St. Augustine Beach
Andrea Samuels, Vice Mayor City of St. Augustine Beach
Edward George, Commissioner City of St. Augustine Beach
Shelby Jack, Town Manager, Town of Hastings
Pam Stevens, Land Use Coordinator, Town of Hastings
Gary Bruce, The Republican Executive Committee
Gerry Dixon, Port Waterway and Beach Commission
Dr. William Abare, President Flagler College

(02/08/10 - 1 - 9:59 a.m.) Mica opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. He explained the reason for the gathering, and noted that there were certain deadlines that they had to meet in Congress. He said he wanted to hear from local officials about what their priorities were.

Mica thanked Flagler College for hosting the meeting. He then reviewed some of the issues they had been working on. He said he would like to see the post office relocated and the property acquired by Flagler College. He spoke regarding the finishing of the Bridge of Lions, the replacement of the seawall and flooding issues in downtown St.

Augustine. He said a request was made to FEMA for assistance. He said the renovation of the Castillo and the Visitor Information Center was now falling into place, and they hoped to have it done in time for the 450th celebration. He stated that it was a huge economic engine for the community. He mentioned that the Council on Aging had opened its new Riverhouse facility, noted Cathy Brown's great leadership and said there was no other facility like it for seniors in the United States. He added that their new intermodal center had been fully funded by the Federal Government. He thanked the City for co-locating the Greyhound Bus pick-up with their parking facility. He spoke of the first priority of the County for transportation, S.R. 9-A, and noted they were struggling because of the State's transportation budget. He mentioned West Augustine improvements in utilities and facilities along that route and in the neighborhoods there, including the recreational facilities with Weed & Seed funds. He spoke of the Veteran's Administration nursing home and thanked Rep. Proctor and the previous County Commission, and said the project was well underway. He stated that in Putnam County there would be a full service Veteran's Clinic which would open in September or October, and St. Johns County, as well as other nearby counties, would be impacted by that as it will give some relief to the veterans in the existing clinics. He said the deadline for requests would be February 26, and he would like to limit projects to one. He asked them not to submit two. He asked them to give him their top priority and that is what they would try to pursue. He said Wiley Deck was the District Representative and would assist them with those requests.

Mica asked each member at the table to identify themselves and then asked members of the audience to identify themselves as well.

Representative Bill Proctor said that given the challenges in Tallahassee, he was reluctant to advise Mica on anything. He said a common concern was healthcare, including Medicaid, and they were way off balance by \$3.6 million with that budget. He noted they would have \$1.9 million more in revenue but \$4.6 million more in expenses primarily in the Medicaid area, unemployment and welfare. He stated that they were borrowing \$300 million from the Federal Government, and they had to raise unemployment taxes from \$8 to over \$100, which put a major burden on small businesses. He added that Medicaid was going to have to get some sort of waiver. He cautioned that another health related issue was that there were a large number of nurses and doctors retiring. He said there were four medical schools that the State had to fund, but there were no residency placements available and they desperately needed help on that. He said the State had to have a balanced budget, but he didn't think there would be any new taxes because it would intensify the recession. He said there were other issues statewide, and offshore drilling was another big issue. He stated it was not a quick fix for the budget because it would be ten years, at the earliest, that the State would see any revenue from it. He spoke on the train from Orlando to Tampa, and he hoped they would be able to talk about one from Jacksonville to Miami, but the FDOT was not ready to discuss it yet. He said by 2030 Florida was projected to have a population of 30 million, so they would have to work toward those transportation needs. He asked Mica to do everything he could to cut the National budget.

Mica responded to the healthcare issue, and noted they had spent a whole year on that, and there was some relief in the last stimulus package, but that this year it would be decreasing. He said there were fundamental problems in healthcare and the President had invited both parties to sit down on February 25 to look at healthcare issues as well as Medicare and Medicaid issues. He said his main focus was jobs and in that regard he had done three Small Business Association seminars. He noted that they were also going to do export seminars on March 5 and 8. He said they were going to put an on-line jobs fair together for the 7th District, utilizing a web site to alert the community to where jobs were located. He added that community bankers and lenders needed to be

encouraged to begin lending again, as many people were saying they just couldn't get loans for businesses. He said they wanted to get the smaller banks back into the lending business. He stated that high speed rail was a nice project, but the most successful link would be from the Orlando airport to the Disney convention center. He said they had to look at commuter rail and commuter extensions, and they had been talking with Jacksonville Transit Authority, trying to improve cost effective alternatives in certain corridors. He thanked Proctor for his attendance.

Ron Sanchez thanked him for having the gathering. He said it was an interesting, challenging and dangerous period they were in. He said he had given a list of the County's priorities to Wiley Deck. He said the St. Augustine Beach renourishment was very important. Mica commented that they had the full support from the Corps of Engineers, the local study was underway, and the bigger study was underway from Atlantic Beach to Ponce Inlet. He said they were trying to get a sound factual study and good sound engineering on the project. He added it was a public safety issue as the ocean was 30 feet away from A1A in some spots. He said it was a top priority and it was underway.

Edward George from St. Augustine Beach said he had just attended the 23rd Annual National Conference on Beach Technology where they were looking at more permanent options for the area at the pier, where the sand kept washing away. He added that they were looking at a sand source which was off shore. He said the next re-nourishment should hold them over until a more permanent fix could be found. He said he had nominated Mica for the Shores Beach Renourishment Society Award to be presented in Washington.

Sanchez continued and said the County public safety communication system, the West Augustine sewer system and other West Augustine, Armstrong and Hastings improvements were all important. He added that SR 9-B, SR 312, the SR 313 bypass, and the CR 210 project were all extremely important. He said there were also concerns regarding beach driving at the park, and that it was really going to hurt the economy for the people down there. He asked for special consideration on that matter. He noted the problems with the job market and cautioned that people had lost confidence in the economy. He said they had lost a lot of money and those who did have money were not spending it. Mica agreed they needed stability with finances and taxes. He said he would take that message back to Washington again. Sanchez added that the community banks were suffering for the mess that had been made by the big guys.

Cyndi Stevenson responded to a question from Mica and said studies were being done on the proposed bridge for the outer beltway. She noted that Allen Mosley was appointed to be the District Secretary. She also said CR 210 and U.S. 1 were hurricane evacuation routes and needed to be promoted. Mica said the tentative plan was to extend the highway bill until the end of the year. He said the administration had proposed an 18 month extension.

Phil Mays said SR 9B was still their main concern, and phase I on 9B was funded, but they wanted to continue with Phase II. He thanked Mica for his support on that. He said he was on the Transportation Planning Organization Board, and commented on the FEC rails from Jacksonville to Orlando. Mica said the State made a quiet push at the end, to get as much as they could for the high speed rail link, and ended up getting \$1.1 billion. He said the part in Orlando would get done because it had great ridership, and the part in Tampa wouldn't be built for awhile. He said the funding would be in the next round of funding. He said there was \$4.4 billion of rail money, of which \$2.5 was extra rail money for high speed and other projects, so there was a shot at that category. He said there was also a shot that the Jacksonville/Miami request would be coming up

shortly. Mays said it was important for the northern part of the state not to miss out on the planning. Mica said it could even be used as a commuter service with connections by bus and other modes.

Andrea Samuels said a lot of Florida's economy was tourist driven and asked how the re-nourishment funds would be designated to incorporate tourism as part of economic growth and development. Mica said beach renourishment was pretty well funded, and he had supported fees on visas that were going into a fund for promotion of tourism. He said it had passed the House and had a good chance of passage in the Senate. He said it was to promote tourism.

Ken Bryan spoke on the West Augustine project, and that the County had been working with Flagler College and the Health Department to conduct surveys on health related issues in West Augustine. He said he would be providing Mica with a copy of the study. He said there were high levels of coliform, possibly fecal bacteria, in the drinking water. He said other safety issues were being reviewed as well, and they had received a \$20,000 grant for the survey. He said the survey was significant in that it would help them secure additional funding. Mica said they might be able to help on water projects and asked him to keep them posted.

Quinn responded to a question from Mica and stated he had recently been to Ft. Hood, Texas and had visited with Commissioner Mark Miner who was doing well. Mica said Miner was a great young man and they were very proud of him.

Joe Boles thanked Mica for the transportation funding for the Council on Aging and noted how important it was to the work force in St. Johns County. He said the City's number one industry was tourism and their 450th Celebration was a creator for jobs and economic development, and it would be the biggest economic generator they could come up with for a while. He said their first priority was for the half million for the National Commission, which they needed his help on, to get the National Commission moving along. He added that all their local efforts were focused through that National Commission, and it brought a lot of national attention. Mica suggested sending a letter regarding that, so that it wouldn't fall between the cracks, and to send one to Senator Nelson as well. Boles said they were excited about the seawall project, and it was moving along. He asked for Mica's support with any extra push he could give. Mica said he had a meeting scheduled with Craig Fugate who was a great ally. He said Fugate could not discuss any Florida projects directly with him, but he would be meeting with a Deputy in his department. He said he felt they should be well positioned on that. Boles said they were happy that the Greyhound Bus would be operating out of their transportation center at the parking garage. He said a train depot would eventually connect with that and he asked for support for moving that along. He said they were also looking at streetscaping improvements especially on King Street and St. George Street. He added that they were also going to beautify the entrance where the old car wash stood. He said they would be looking to the Feds for some funding there. Mica said he was hoping they could help with the entry and making it more attractive. Boles said they were working on the sewage and water extension in West Augustine, and they had been working with the County on that. Mica said there were different funding categories they could apply to for assistance. Boles said he hoped to invite Mica to the opening of the Bridge of Lions.

Don Crichlow spoke on the under bridge lighting for the Bridge of Lions. He said it was the lowest dollar item on their list and would get the most bang for the buck, and it was a great opportunity to add it to the bridge construction to make that landmark what it should be.

Leanna Freeman said Mica had the list of the various rehabilitation programs that ranged from properties to sidewalks and road repairs. Mica said University of Florida President, Bernie Machem was in town and he had repeated those interests several times. He added that everyone was struggling financially. He said their requests had made it to his level and he was pleased with that. He said they had so many historic properties that it boggled the mind. Boles said they would reach out and coordinate with Machem.

Nancy Sikes-Kline added that the Riberia Street improvements were important. She said they were contributing their own money. Mica said they would add that request to the list.

Brud Helhoski said the biggest priority was the continued beach restoration and renourishment as it was important for regional tourism. He said they had acquired the Maratea property, and it was beautiful undeveloped beachfront that they were looking to turn into a passive park and educational area. He said there was an additional 4.5 acres that they would like to acquire before the economy rebounded. He said it was untouched and pristine and they could use funding for that. He said the County and the City were working at the pier area on acquiring some property to increase green space and to move the volleyball courts across the road to increase parking. He said they hoped to refurbish and extend the pier at some time in the future. He noted that they had applied for some grants to change the lighting so that it was more energy efficient and sea turtle friendly, and they were hoping to extend it along Beach Boulevard and A1A. Mica asked Helhoski to follow up on that acquisition, as they would never get it cheaper and never get it back once it was developed. He said he didn't know if they could help but he would look at it.

Edward George said they were looking at throwing sand on the beach, a temporary fix, but they were looking at a more permanent structure to prevent erosion. He also spoke on beach driving and said they had passed a resolution along with Hastings and the County to support beach driving. He said at the pier, part of the destination plan was the building leased by the Cultural Council. He said they needed another \$1 million to finish refurbishing that building. He said they needed that funding and the upper floor needed attention. He said it was an important part of the vision plan. He said they also had a sewer project with the County which had received Federal funding, and it was a good thing for job creation. He said there was also a possibility of getting a new Marriott with a convention center, and they were going to need a drainage system for that project and would need additional funding for that. He said water quality issues were going to be more intense in the future. Mica said they were working on the beach driving issue.

Andrea Samuels said she was pleased to hear that the City was beautifying their entrance, and she said she would like to see beautification at their northern entrance at St. Augustine Beach. Mica suggested she put in a request and they would see what they could do. She said she hadn't heard anything about reimbursement for utilizing alternative energy, especially for solar power. Mica said there was a whole host of new programs in the Department of Energy. He asked Wiley Deck to look into that, and to get the Legislative Assistant involved to let them know what they were eligible for.

Helhoski said they would love to put a solar farm on about five acres at a former land fill. Mica told them to follow up on that with a proposal and they would get a Legislative Assistant to see if they were eligible for any Federal grants or programs. Helhoski said there was frustration among small business owners regarding loans. Mica said he would take the message back to Washington and try to draw attention to that issue.

Shelby Jack, Hastings Town Manager, said they had limited resources and their needs were broad, including infrastructure, drainage issues, and Main Street development. Mica asked if there was a plan for the whole downtown area. He said they could probably get some funding, if they put a request in. He stated that Bunnell had been working on one. He said they should follow up with that, and they might be able to help. She said waterlines, infrastructure, and drainage were important issues. He said February 26 was the deadline, but a one page application was important.

Mica asked about the Airport Authority. Sanchez said they would be coming off the tax rolls in October. He said they had a lot of activities going on there. Mica said they tried to help them. He then asked for comments from the audience.

Carl Blevin said the overall study for beach renourishment and the progress of that study was dependent upon funding of several hundred thousand dollars, and that it was going to take years to complete. He suggested that if they funded it fully, it would be cheaper than if they stretched it out over a decade. Mica said he would check with the Corps of Engineers to see if they could wrap it up in order to save money. He said it often took many years to finish a project with the Corps, and told of a 15 year project with the Corps.

Maureen Ortagus asked if there were any plans for the 450th celebration. Mica said they were going to finish the appointment by the Secretary, and he had submitted Mel Martinez as his nominee. He said when the Commission was in place, he needed all the local officials to support the requests of Senator LeMieux, Senator Nelson, and himself for the financing of the celebration.

He thanked them again for their service and for meeting with them.

With there being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Approved _____ April 6 _____, 2010

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____

Ron Sanchez, Chair

ATTEST: CHERYL STRICKLAND, CLERK

By: _____

Deputy Clerk

