



**ST. ANDREW &
ST. JOSEPH BAYS**
ESTUARY PROGRAM
at FSU PANAMA CITY

***ST. ANDREW AND ST. JOSEPH BAYS
ESTUARY PROGRAM***

***POLICY BOARD
MEETING 23***

June 25, 2025

*Report prepared by
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Florida State University*

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BACKGROUND

On June 25, 2025, the Policy Board of the St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP) met in person and videoconference. The meeting was the twenty-third in a series of meetings to support the guidance of the Estuary Program.

- Policy Board roles and responsibilities
- Member contribution and allocation methodology
- Discussion regarding At-large membership
- Operating budget – continued conversations
- Discussion regarding East Pass

Approximately 14 Policy Board members, staff and public attended. (A list of participants can be found in Appendix A). The agenda was as below and reference the Board book found at this link:

1. Welcome and Roll Call
 2. Approval of April 2025 notes
 3. Policy Board Roles and Responsibilities
 4. At large membership – Commissioner Daniel Raffield
 5. Member contribution proposal and revisit allocation methodology and Finance Strategy
 6. Operating budget -continued conversations
 7. Discussion regarding East Pass – Commissioner Ayers request
 8. Estuary Program grant and proposal progress (quick updates)
 9. Update on DARPA reef
 10. Other Program Updates
 11. Policy Board member/Agency Updates
- Public Comment
- Adjourn

This document provides meeting notes and discussions points raised by members.

WELCOME AND MEETING OBJECTIVES

Commissioner Perno reviewed the objectives and agenda for today's meeting as well as the discussions from the past meeting. He thanked members for participating and taking the time out of their day to be here today. He led a round of introductions as there were new members around the table and online and verified quorum.

See Appendix A for a list of members and participants.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Perno referred to the meeting notes in the Boardbook and Jessica added that they were sent very last minute for review to Commissioner Ayers and he provided some comments that had been addressed in the attached copy.

Councilmember Coburn made a motion to approve the meeting notes

Commissioner Hammond 2nd the motion

The motion passed unanimously

POLICY BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Commissioner Perno moved the meeting to the discussion of Policy Board Roles and Responsibilities and turned the meeting over for Jessica to go into further details. Jessica referred to the Boardbook and the various materials contained within this section. Jessica explained that the members of the Management Council and their roles as well as the Policy Board members and their roles. Jessica mentioned that the FPL representative is now vacant but they are working to fill the role. Additionally, an overview of the Governance structure of the Estuary Program was provided in the Boardbook and Jessica went through the structure and why the structure was set up as it is, the different layers of the structure and their purpose as well as the history behind the decisions to set it up with the current structure. This was based on a stakeholder assessment that was completed by the FSU Consensus Center who interviewed several citizens on what has worked and what hasn't worked in order to set up the structure. One of the overwhelming results was the need for locally elected officials to be at the table throughout the process. This structure was set up in part from those results and in part modeled after other successful National Estuary Programs in the event the Policy Board wanted to move forward to National Designation. Jessica asked for a gut check to ensure that these roles and responsibilities are still reflective of the Policy Board's goals for the Estuary Program.

Discussion:

- Mayor Hammond agreed and said to keep things as they are at this point until we have more time underneath the program. The closer we get to National Designation it keeps making changes then it may get us further away from designation.
- Commissioner Perno reminded the Board that the structure is set up based on input from the community and that we all must be behind the CCMP as that is the guiding force of the EP regardless of national designation but as Policy Board members, we are stewards of the CCMP and the Estuary Program.
- Councilmember Coburn related the EP to the TPO and Commissioner Perno agreed that the Estuary Program's Policy Board is the TPO for the water.
- Mr. Boudreau related the Estuary Program to the Transportation Partnership Organization (TPO) that the other members of the Policy Board may be more familiar with where the TPO board has a role in identifying transportation needs and follows the 5-year plan. The same structure and role exist for the Estuary Program board where the goal is to identify at a high level what are the biggest priorities based on the driving issues facing the Bays to make sure the bay is getting healthier each year. This program itself won't be responsible for all the projects just like the TPO and ECRC doesn't do the projects but helps to inform priorities across a large area and connect priorities across jurisdictions.

- Commissioner Perno mentioned that the Estuary Program has already paid dividends for the City of Lynn Haven as they stopped the press on an expansion project for our wastewater treatment plant by staying in tune with what was going on and rather than expand we could deactivate and partner with the County. This project to decommission and discontinue WWT on the Bay is beneficial to the environment and to the City of Lynn Haven but was a stroke of luck from the Estuary Program to get that ball rolling in the right direction.
- Commissioner Raffield appreciated the additional information that was provided and the work that was put into it to explain the structure and why it was set up the way it was and has concerns regarding representation of Gulf County and that is why he brought up the At Large membership. Commissioner Raffield expressed frustration that they are not represented and would like to see more future engagement. He agreed with Pat and others of where we are but would like see more future participation.
- Jessica explained that Port St. Joe does have representation but wasn't able to make it today but Gulf County has been a challenge but that doesn't mean we aren't working there and don't get input about the needs over in the area. Gulf County has similar challenges and some similarities such as stormwater but perhaps there is a way to encourage more participation at various levels of the committee such as at the Management Council.
- Mr. Boudreau provided examples of work over in Gulf County including an H&H study funded by NOAA to identify strengths and weaknesses of stormwater system and identify some possible areas of improvement. In Gulf County, Jessica with The Nature Conservancy to work and complete a preliminary feasibility on Salinas Park that could be used in grant applications including soil testing that could help inform further design and permitting work.
- Jessica provided another example where Parker is not represented at the Policy Board level or on the Management Council but we regularly work with the staff on the stormwater committee and have recently installed LittaTraps.
- Commissioner Perno asked if anyone from Gulf County was on the Management Council. Jessica explained that there were two members on the Management Council but they are not that active. There are some members that cover the Gulf area on the Science and Technical Committee that do participate.

Jessica thought this was a good opportunity to move the meeting to the next item on the agenda which is to discuss At-Large membership.

AT-LARGE MEMBERSHIP

Jessica provided background for this item that Sherry Hardy from the County emailed to ask what the process was to add an At-Large member. However, At-Large members are not addressed in the by-laws so Jessica didn't feel that she had the guidance to accurately answer the question and thought it would be best for the Board to discuss this issue. Jessica said these are issues that we may need to put additional time into creating a process on how this or letters of support may be handled.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Perno asked what to do about general stakeholders at any level. Is there an application process?
 - Jessica described the process for each level of governance. The Advisory Committees are open to the public and anyone interested in getting involved. The information for each meeting is available on the website and sent out in the newsletter. The Management Council representatives are appointed by the Policy Board to fill seats for specific categories. Jessica said that community engagement is challenging and thought we lost a lot of members from the CCMP process. We've tried mixing things up but it continues to be a struggle. We are planning to mix things back up and host a type of

membership workshop on a bi-annual basis where we pick 1-2 things that we work on over the year and have targeted messages.

- Mr. Bourdeau reminded the Board about the workshops that were held previously and how well attended they were with great input from the community.
- Commissioner Raffield says there needs to be a strategy and a game plan on how to institute something that we can touch and enable people to serve and until that is done we can't move the ball.
- Commissioner Perno agreed but mentioned that it is up to the Board as public officials to come up with a pool of eligible citizens as sometimes people just need a designation.
- Commissioner Raffield said the CCMP is a good action plan but we need some action.
 - Jessica reminded the Board that the CCMP is only a year old.
- Mayor Hammond reminded the board that this isn't a new problem where there have been numerous organizations that have been started similar to this in the past. Someone starts something, not finish it and then someone else picks it up and it goes in a different direction and they never go anywhere. We need to show what the EP CAN do not just what it is currently doing in order to gather backing from the community.
- Jessica brought it back to funding and although it is like being a broken record, the issue is that we often cannot respond to community desires when we are grant funded. If the community says we want an education plan to bring resources to the school, I can't task Aleighsa with that because there are no funds to support that effort. We know of many other things that need to be completed but we can't always do those things but sometimes we get lucky where some of the grants will fund some of the priorities but we can't be dependent on grants to move the needle forward.
- Commissioner Ayers said the pass being opened would move the needle.
- Mayor Hammond tried to steer the conversation back and stated that the pass doesn't have to do with anything that we are talking about right now.
- Commissioner Ayers rebutted that the EP could advocate for the pass and that would be a big deal.
- Commissioner Perno redirected the conversation as the East Pass is later on the agenda and something we can discuss further later today. Bay County is sort of the connective tissue but we don't have Gulf County represented and Commissioner Raffield thinks that At-Large may be the way to go but we need to give Jessica direction.
 - Jessica mentioned that it seems with new members and as we get more robust that it may be good to have an operational guidance document to handle things like this and things that can more easily change than putting into the By-laws. If we want to go the route of At-large members then the by-laws would need to be edited.
- Commissioner Perno asked Jessica if there are at large members currently and if so, we have them but they are not addressed in existing guidance document.
 - Jessica answered with referring to the members in the Boardbook and stated that the members provided is what she uses as At-large are not addressed in the By-laws but on our website which was taken from the old website managed by Consensus Center has two members. One of them is not active and hasn't been for years and the other is Darryl who was slid into an At-large member because we were being formed at the time of a job turnover and Darryl going from a member to a non-member.
 - Commissioner Perno clarified so yes, we have an At-large member, but you have no direction and Jessica confirmed. He asked if the Board wanted to come up with something for at large membership and bring it to the next meeting.
 - Jessica provided another idea that we could do an advisory role from Gulf County which is what the At-large membership is but we could have a specific At-large member from Gulf County seat.
 - Commissioner Raffield said what's the point then if they don't have a vote.
 - Jessica said that if we want to change the at-large membership to be voting than that is an entirely different discussion because currently Darryl does not vote.

- Commissioner Perno added that we would still get their input and participation even though they are non-voting.
 - Commissioner Raffield emphasized that the point is that we need to get Gulf County at the table and how are we going to do that and if we need to change policy or structure then we should to get them to the table.
 - Commissioner Ayers asked Commissioner Raffield if Gulf County was going to make him a voting member. His answer was no and Commissioner Ayers said well then we should do whatever they want to do with us and their input is important.
- Jessica reminded the Board about some history when discussing membership and voting membership and previously conversations regarding delegates. There was an interest in exploring if delegates could attend because sometimes there are unavoidable conflicts and there isn't anyone else that can come fill the seat. Board decided they did not want delegates because they couldn't be other elected officials because of sunshine so then would have to be a non elected person but the Stakeholder Assessment was overwhelmingly telling that locally elected officials had to be at the table for this program to be successful.
 - If at-large gets a vote then it would circumvent the fact that you are all elected by a group of citizens that believe you would best represent their priorities.
- Jessica informed the Board regarding history of working with Gulf County to encourage representation. She has reached out to Gulf County and asked if there was another member of the Commission that would better serve the role and they discussed internally and decided to keep it Commissioner Quinn. I have heard talk about a letter getting sent to the Estuary Program but I have not received it but based on the comments it could be a request to be removed from the Estuary Program or put another person on it. Jessica confirmed the feeling of getting Gulf represented and have felt it since formation.
- Mr. Boudreau provided an idea that if the appointee was not a local official then the goal is to have a voice and have weight then perhaps that provides what we need in order to ensure that Gulf County is represented. He added that although we do not have representation at the board level doesn't mean the Program hasn't been working over there and not really sure why they don't want to sit at the table.
- Jessica thought that perhaps the Commissioners may see us as a regulatory group or one that is an adversarial advocacy group. Also, some citizens that are uninformed about our program but think it is an advocacy group and tie our name to some effort they are interested in making progress on which leaves a sour taste in their mouths.
- Commissioner Ayers asked if Jessica had gone over to give a presentation in the past. Jessica said that she had been going to the meeting and had spoken to announce various events during the public comment period. Sylvia Williams is the TDC director and on the Management Council and can get insight from her and Jessica indicated that it may not be time to give up on getting them to the table.
- Commissioner Raffield asked that if we wanted non-elected officials to be on the board they would need to change the bylaws. He thought it would be better to have someone that wanted to serve rather than someone kicking and screaming and being dragged here. We need to explore being able to add non-elected people. He was voluntold that he had to serve and although he was glad it would be a better opportunity if they wanted to serve rather than throwing them on the ride.
- Mr. Boudreau used himself as an example of an at-large member that participates at multiple committees and provide comments and insight but doesn't vote. A member from Gulf County could come here and have conversations and provide insight but would that have the backing of the County?
- Commissioner Raffield thinks that if we leave it to the Gulf County Board they will bring forward someone that has multiple generational relations to the waters. There's where you'll find the perspective and they'll give you that perspective and we need to figure out a way to get to the table.
- Mayor Hammond agreed with Commissioner Raffield but felt that we had to get the Board's elected officials from the community interested and to the table first. If we went out and took a survey of them then many were likely voluntold to be there and we would find very few of the board members of the city are even interested. They just want to come in and serve a little bit and then go home and don't want to dedicate the time and effort. Without them, we don't have an in to get things done.

- Commission Raffield discussed the discrepancy in salary of the Bay County Commissioner vs. a Gulf County Commissioner and that Bay County Commissioners make decent wages. But if you have an 8-5 job on top of being a Commissioner than you are probably not going to break away to participate because you aren't passionate about it. But if you are passionate then you would be here. We don't have a tool in the toolbox and we need to figure it out to give Jessica direction.
- Commissioner Perno summarized that we have a current policy of only elected officials. If we change to a representative or someone appointed to be a voting member than we have to do so for all seats, not just Gulf County. Jessica, Commissioners Raffield and Perno could appeal to Gulf County and offer to do a meeting over there 1-2 times a year and extend an olive branch. If there is no response or participation then we can explore changing the rules and what that might look like. I recommend tasking Jessica with appealing with them and meeting with them.
- Commissioner Ayers added that Mexico Beach should also be on the list and Jessica could meet with them on her way over and kill two birds with one stone.
 - Jessica reminded the Board that they have had a Mexico Beach representative in the past and they appoint annually and she has been working to identify the new representative since the last one abruptly resigned, but they also have had turnover with their administrator.
- Commissioner Ayers then asked if a Commissioner in Gulf County could appoint someone? Commissioner Perno reminded him of the discussion and that currently that is not an option.
- Jessica provided an example of what happens when representatives are altered by explaining the evolution of the Management Council. The county representative was initially Bob Majka then the next document was Ian Crelling and now it is Wayne Porter. Wayne is a great representative and comes to all meetings and provides great but it moved down the chain and Wayne is fantastic but likely doesn't have as much interaction with the Commissioners for this Program to be part of what is reported out on and bridge the gap. The fear with this program is that if we open the Board to be appointed and have a number of passionate people we will have a number of fantastic conversations but not have the buy in and perspective to make a difference and we become another group of well meaning individuals that are just scraping by.
- Multiple members discussed a path forward asking Jessica to work on making headway with Gulf County by the next meeting in August. Commissioner Ayers also added that progress should be made with Mexico Beach and Parker.
 - Jessica said she would work on Gulf County and Mexico Beach but Parker may take a bit longer.
- Mayor Hammond added that every time an elected official changes over the new person doesn't have the background and familiarity. Teresa is the City clerk and attends to be the bridge to the next elected position and we work closely together and she is here to carry things forward to the next person. Although she doesn't have a voting seat or say in decisions she has a depth of knowledge that can be passed on to the next person. He urged other members to consider someone else in each city/county to have someone that could maintain and educate so we don't have to reinvent the wheel every time we have an election.
- Commissioner Raffield discussed that he spends every day trying to immerse himself into the new language and if not reading the Boardbook and talking with staff and employees at the County then missing things. It's hard to dive in to the EP since we only meet every other month.
- Mr. Boudreau returned the discussion to an operational document that was discussed earlier to help with the onboarding of new members.
- Jessica summarizes the discussion that by the next meeting the Policy Board would like to see progress toward presenting to Gulf County Commission, Mexico Beach and will also try with Parker although that will likely be a harder lift. Jessica also summarized the conversations regarding an operational document that was requested to be kept to 1 page that would include the different money areas and things on how the Board and programs works operationally.
- Commissioner Raffield asked if we could have public workshops to get people involved.
 - Jessica recapped past work that has occurred including public workshops and open houses together with a monthly public forum that is open to the public where we have invited speakers to talk about a key topic. Public workshops have yielded around 20 people each time we hold them and the monthly

Tides and Talks brings out anywhere from 5-20. Jessica also informed the Board that staff are working on having an annual meeting in November and invest in a lunch for the Community Action Committee where we can brainstorm 1-2 priorities for the next year and have some momentum building.

- Commissioner Raffield asked if there was a marketing budget.
 - Jessica responded with a no because our program is grant funded so grants don't pay for marketing. We can write in outreach related tasks but not pure marketing. We would rely on donations but those are haphazard at best. We do have our 2nd annual Race for the Bays that we are using as our big annual event at this time but at this time it is too difficult to determine consistency. The big annual event would likely be the only place a marketing budget could come from.
- Commissioner Ayers referred back to the Operational Document and said that it shouldn't be bureaucratic but just something that outlines things in one page as it would be counterproductive to sit here and create new guidelines.
- Commissioner Coburn said it seemed that the time would be better spent doing outreach to Gulf County and Mexico Beach than to create more documents because we need a big win and publicize it like the LittaTraps. You all have been installing the LittaTraps but haven't seen it on the news or anything.
 - Jessica confirmed that the story hit the news twice, we pushed on Facebook multiple times and almost all cities also pushed posts on their Facebook and it was a write up in the Newsheald.
- Commissioner Raffield stated that it wasn't necessarily newsworthy.
- Ms. Taylor agreed that an operational manual would be a lot of work but could create a guided ppt or video that could be a briefer way to give an orientation. And for marketing, maybe there is a way to have a partnership with FSU's communication group and get a student to support the marketing.
 - Jessica explained that we had previously explored a partnership with an FSU internship but without having the ability to pay and the issue isn't always time but rather funds to get things pushed out wider. Additionally, at the time of consideration our branding was undergoing redevelopment as was FSU's but now that it is all solidified it may be a better time to revisit.
- Jessica clarified that although the operational document may seem like a waste for the Board, she felt that it was time well spent because she has to put numerous documents together for each member's orientation meeting that she has with them prior to their first Board meeting.
 - Commissioner Raffield advised that the Board let Jessica create whatever document she felt is needed and work toward increasing active membership.

MEMBER CONTRIBUTION PROPOSAL, ALLOCATIONS, and FINANCE STRATEGY

Commissioner Perno moved the meeting to the next agenda item and handed it over to Jessica who provided a bit of background. To date, the EP hasn't requested contributions because there was no bank account to put those contributions into but now that has changed and we have a bank account and a process for getting the funds to FSU. There have been some questions asking where the contributions came from and Jessica provided that background. She also referred to the Finance Strategy that although is old and likely needs to be updated it does lay out the staff path, funding needs, and direction of where to secure said funding, which includes member contributions. Jessica then drew the Board's attention to the Member Contribution proposal that has been sent to some of the cities.

Jessica then walked through the member allocation tiers and recapped the conversations where we tried \$0.01, \$0.05, \$1.00 etc. The result that was voted on was that we looked at population and then tiered the populations and set an amount that centered around the population but would be sufficient in helping to fund a portion of the operations allowing for more programmatic and strategic operations. The goal of contributions is to help bridge funding and provide unrestricted funding allowing for securing more grants etc.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Raffield asked how many cities have contributed.

- Jessica repeated that we have not asked previously because we didn't have a bank account so to date we have only sent out two of these proposals. One sent to Springfield who has already contributed and Lynn Haven is in current discussions.
- Commissioner Perno informed the Board that they have been in discussions and there is a strategic planning meeting on the 9th that he would like Jessica to attend.
- Commissioner Pease discussed the operating budget and thanked Jessica for all of the trouble putting it together and worked a lot on it to get to the bottom line. The long and short of it is that if the cities and counties are going to be running a business which is what this is then we can't run a business sufficiently if we are constantly worried where the money is coming from. Commissioner Pease didn't think that Jessica was asking for enough money and mentioned the urging she made at the County meeting before asking for specific amounts because the budget wasn't quite finished. She offered to address any questions on the budget and she also wanted to mention that it is important that we are keeping meeting meetings properly.
 - Jessica asked for clarification and whether or not the current meeting notes were not satisfactorily?
 - Commissioner Pease said that the notes are summaries and don't include specific votes when votes came up for discussion such as writing a letter for the pass it was buried in other docs and not clear in the meeting notes. She is asking for serious discussion notes to be more clear in the notes because it wasn't clear who wanted it open and who didn't and if it goes into another document then it gets lost. She is requesting for more verbiage to be put in to the meeting notes.
 - Jessica asked to clarify that the vote she believes Commissioner Pease is referring to was not properly pulled out of the notes but she has fixed that and it should be reuploaded to the website. Also, there was never a vote taken on the pass itself ever. The only thing that was voted on regarding that was all letters of support and not just for the East Pass but many other projects as well and only the writing of the letters of support and not working on the project.
 - Commissioner Pease said that when they voted on the CCMP book the pass wasn't in there and that she would like the Board to revisit that specific thing on whether or not to write a letter of support because maybe people didn't understand that they were voting against writing letters of support for the pass.
- Mayor Hammond wanted to back up and revisit the request for funding that was initially brought up. He advised that we keep the allocations as they are currently because requests have already gone out. However, the request is only a suggestion and if the County or others want to give more than they can certainly do so.
 - Jessica said that she doesn't send the invoice out until it is requested with the amount that is requested is confirmed and can then send out. She stated appreciation for the contribution and has been provided and Commissioner Pease to the work on the budget and the urging to give more money to the program. It makes a very big difference.
- Commissioner Ayers asked what the Springfield contribution was and Jessica confirmed that it was \$10,000 as is stated in the table.

EAST PASS

Commissioner Perno then moved the meeting to the East Pass and asked Jessica to provide the background. Jessica stated that much of the background of this project predated her as the Executive Director but to clarify that the pass and the needs of the pass are indeed included in the Goal 5 of the Water and Sediment Quality and Quantity focus area. It discusses fresh and salt water because the East Pass is only one project and there are others like the freshwater entering from the Intracoastal Waterway, freshwater from Deer Point Lake into North Bay. The Board from the first meeting I attended after being hired made it very clear how important the project is and it was indeed included in the CCMP.

The previous vote regarding letters of support or endorsement was brought because we were receiving numerous requests for letters of support and they were often putting us in reaction mode. In order to write an informative letter of support we have to understand the project, the implications of the project, the information that exists around the project etc and we can't just write letters using someone's form or because someone says the information is as they

say it is but requires a lot of tracking down of information. It also put the Board into a situation where members were voting on projects in different municipalities and counties' jurisdictions. The Policy Board members felt that they could push on projects within their own municipality and not use the Estuary Program to push letters of support for different projects. Jessica stated that is the way she has been operating and during that vote it was discussed that I was able to write letters of support for grant applications. However, that wasn't documented so I have ceased providing these.

Discussion:

- Ms. Cox stated that it sounds like you don't currently have the operating budget or time to spend reviewing these other projects.
- Jessica confirmed that we didn't and we also didn't have the CCMP to which to refer so when the vote was brought up we didn't have a document to say that this project meets this priority or this priority in the CCMP which is our guiding document.
- Jessica stated that she believes the vote and subsequent lack of writing support letters has not been well received by some but the letters of support was not because of the East Pass but it is one of many projects.
- Commissioner Pease apologized for putting Jessica in a situation to get a Letters of support but we have new board members now and stated that she would like to make a motion that the Board approve a letter of support for opening the East Pass.

**Commissioner Pease made a motion for the Policy Board to write a letter of support for opening the East Pass.
Commissioner Ayers seconded the motion**

Subsequent discussion:

- Commissioner Raffield said that it's part of the footprint of the Estuary Program and it's a great idea and a bit of what we are trying to do and clean up the bay. He stated that he believed it should be done on a case-by-case basis.
- Commissioner Ayers stated that this project is more of a general situation that affects the entire Bay isn't specific to Lynn haven. This is a bay estuary problem because the area behind Tyndall will create red tide back there and permeate and is now an estuary for sharks.
- Mayor Hammond commented that sharks have always been in the Bay to which Commissioner Ayers stated that there are a lot of things that aren't there anymore.
- Commissioner Perno asked if there was a process in place or an entity to open the pass?
- Mayor Hammond stated that the discussion is more about what the Estuary Program should be doing and if they should be writing a letter and not about the process. We voted to stay neutral and not take sides. The Pass and the Outfalls on the beach projects are political issues and a hot topic with the community where you have half that say no and half that say open. We need to continue forward and not take sides on these issues. That's why we voted not to write letters of support because it goes into the political side.
- Commissioner Perno continued his statement that if the county is investing in this project and there is money involved and we need more data then we could build a case that the Estuary Program could support gathering the data so that the EP could be a vital part of moving it forward. The EP has to show the studies and they could do that through their existence and help others collected the necessary information. The EP could be a vital part of this project but does it really have to be in the form of a letter or should we be focused on a process that helps the application get approved. DEP is not going to listen to a bunch of people who want it open and approve it but they are going to ask for data so the EP could help with that.
- Mayor Hammond agreed and said yes the EP could help provide the data
- Commissioner Raffield understood Mayor Hammond's point on the political side but in reference to Commissioner Perno, we have to have the data and the reasons why we move forward or don't and

the EP helps facilitate that on that level and maybe a letter that includes the data findings would be better so the letter has substance behind it.

- Commissioner Perno said that one of the goals to achieve this and it is in the CCMP but if we want this to happen we need to have the data. Can't be advocacy and also gather data and be neutral. If we start advocating and then provide data it may not be trusted. It's vital for the CCMP but we need to go about it in a fair and balanced method and through science.
- Commissioner Ayers said that Commissioner Perno was messed up in his reasoning and that the County is already paying to do the research and that he knows the water has changed and is getting worse unless we do something about it. Other things that go along with the pass include jetties and we have to change the law. I think we can advocate for it and don't have to worry about the science because the county has already done the research. Bill Dozier and I asked for a letter of support a long time ago and we were shot down.
 - Jessica corrected Commissioner Ayers that a request for a letter of support was never requested previously and the pass has been incorporated into the CCMP.
- Mr. Boudreau stated that the Pass is referenced in the CCMP to the understanding of fresh and saltwater balance, the data needs to be understood to know the dynamics of the system. He stated that if you start to advocate on particular projects, the reputation of the EP becomes advocacy. The Board decided to stay neutral because today it's this project but tomorrow it's another. The reputation of the EP is here to provide science and what's impact the health and what will facilitate the health.
- Mayor Hammond stated that it is in the CCMP and it makes the statement that the EP is concerned about it. He stated that he wouldn't feel comfortable to put his name in support of anything that he doesn't understand and some of you are on the water a lot more than others. The Letter of Support is asking these members to put their name to something they may not understand, which is why we have the CCMP and that can be referenced. We don't say yes or no on specific projects because we don't have the expertise and should rely on the CCMP.
- Commissioner Perno asked what the involvement of the EP has been on this project.
 - Jessica replied that we haven't been involved. The contractors contacted me years ago when I first was hired and asked for data but I couldn't provide that but did help to point them in the different directions to obtain the data. At the time I had just started and Ryann wasn't even hired yet and since the County has had a contractor onboard, we haven't been invited to the table.
 - Jessica confirmed that there is no conflict with the project and the Estuary Program.
- Commissioner Perno asked Commissioner Raffield if DEP is actively researching the project, which was not answered.
- Commissioner Pease stated that we cannot be neutral on something that is going to affect the Bay and we aren't trying to be scientists but get the application submitted and the process moving forward. Commissioner Pease raised the topic of Midnight Pass down in Sarasota and her experience visiting and Sarasota County's experience with attempts to get the pass opened. She felt that this is an easy topic for the EP Board to get behind and we aren't saying that we have the science but asking to get the application moving forward to try and get the real science moving forward. The County folks are doing permitting and are telling us that we need the letter from the Estuary Program board and we already have letters from people that use the water every day. We as the Board should get behind this and getting the permits and she doesn't understand what we wouldn't be.
- Commissioner Perno summarized and asked Jessica if we can just write a letter and state what the CCMP says and that it is a goal of the EP?
 - Commissioner Ayers agreed and that we should add in encouragement moving forward with more research.
- Commissioner Raffield stated that there is an overwhelming response from the community on opening the pass including the commercial and recreational flats fisherman and scallopers.

- Mayor Hammond clarified that he wasn't not saying that we do not support the project but that he doesn't feel we need a letter of support from the Estuary Program and that we should just reference the CCMP.
- Commissioner Raffield asked what specifically it says in the CCMP.
 - Jessica read it from the CCMP and stated that it is Goal 5 under Water and Sediment Quality and Quantity Focus Area.
 - Commissioner Raffield said that Goal was exactly what the Pass would do so why couldn't we write a letter of support.
 - Mayor Hammond stated that they could read it and reference it themselves, why would we write letters of support when the CCMP has been published.
 - Commissioner Raffield disagreed and said that we have to stand for something.
 - Commissioner Ayers stated that the entire community supports it.
- Jessica interjected that it sounds like maybe everyone is talking about the same thing but the terminology is tripping people up. Letter of support may not be the right terminology but what she was hearing is more of a letter of alignment with the CCMP. Something that highlights where it is in the CCMP and the intended benefits.
- Commissioner Perno asked Commissioner Pease if a letter of alignment would be sufficient.
 - Commissioner Pease didn't think it would be sufficient but if that's what the board wants then I think we can go ahead and ask Dr. Graham to write the letter and then the Board can look at it at the next meeting and table the motion until then. She felt that the Board needed something they could see and if the Board doesn't want a letter of support that's fine but she didn't think the letter of alignment would be sufficient. She's stated that nothing gets off the table with the Pass so she is pushing hard and doesn't want to water down the emotions.
 - She stated that we could make a motion to draft a letter that Dr. Graham sees sufficient for what our needs are.
- Commissioner Ayers agreed and guessed that if we were to vote now it would be a 3 to 3 tie. Jessica suggested that the Board either call for a vote or not but not try to guess what other members are going to vote.

Commissioner Pease withdrew her motion for a letter of support.

Commissioner Ayers seconded the withdrawal

Commissioner Raffield motioned for Jessica to draft a letter and let the Board review the letter

Mayor Hammond 2nded the motion

Motion passed unanimously

UPDATE ON DARPA REEF

Jessica provided an overview of a project that is part of the Reefense that is a DARPA funded project at the last project where the Policy Board voted to accept monitoring responsibility pending the provision of funding to support the work. Jessica learned recently that the project's funded has been cut and DARPA or a portion of DARPA is under RIFF threat. The research group is looking for additional funding and Jessica wanted to check that it still stands that we would support monitoring pending the provision of funding. The Board agreed.

A FEW ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jessica informed the Board about the Race for the Bays on September 27th and we are looking for sponsors. Please help us get the word out!

The next meeting is scheduled for August 27th at 1 pm at this same location.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Coburn asked when Jessica would be sending out the funding requests to the cities.

- Jessica responded that she will send it whenever the member asks for it and has typically sent them to the City or County manager and representative cc'ed.

Commissioner Perno mentioned the strategic meeting on the 9th in Lynn Haven and his request for Jessica to be there. The meeting was formally adjourned.

Mayor Hammond also discussed that each municipality could help by having a booth and answering questions about the Estuary Program and let the community know you've been involved. Can even connect with EP staff members or other city staff members to hand out flyers.

Commissioner Coburn mentioned Thursday night concerts and will talk to Parks and Rec and see if there is a way to get permission to hand out flyers.

Commissioner Perno adjourned the meeting at 2:50 pm CT.

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANTS JUNE 2025 MEETING

√ Indicates participation at this meeting

MEMBER	AFFILIATION
Local Government Elected Officials, Voting Members	
Allan Branch	Mayor Panama City
Steven Kerigan	Commissioner Port St. Joe
Mary Coburn √	Councilmember, Panama City Beach
Irvin R. Clark. EdD	Associate Dean, Student & Strategic Initiatives, FSU Panama City
Clair Pease √	Commissioner, Bay County
Ralph Hammond √	Mayor, Springfield
Vacant	Councilmember, Mexico Beach
Kenneth Ayers √	Commissioner, Callaway
Vacant	Councilwoman, Parker
Daniel Raffield √	Commissioner, Bay County
Pat Perno √	Commissioner, Lynn Haven
Vacant	Commissioner, Gulf County
Regional, State and Federal Agency Non-Voting Members Present	
Meg Christopher	Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Water Resources Management
Roshita Taylor √	Emerald Coast Regional Council (ECRC)
Vacant	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Thomas McGill (Wade Lehmann) √	U.S. EPA Region 4, Water Division, Chief, Ocean, Wetlands & Streams Protection Branch
Vacant	Bureau of Community Planning & Growth, Florida Dept. of Economic Opportunity
COORDINATION TEAM AND FACILITATORS	
Jessica Graham √	SASJBEP Executive Director
Ryann Rossi √	SASJBEP Scientist
Aleighsa Wright √	SASJBEP Outreach Specialist
Elizabeth Farmer	SASJBEP Research Assistant
Rose Horn	SASJBEP Staff Scientist
Ashley White	SASJBEP Technical Assistant
OTHERS PRESENT	
Darryl Boudreau √	Northwest Florida Water Management District, Regional Policy Manager
Bay County Conference Room	Bay County
Teresa Cox	City of Springfield Clerk