



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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September 1, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council Members

FR: Nick Howland, President, Jacksonville City Council

RE: Creation and Charge of the Special Committee on Drowning Prevention

Jacksonville is a city defined by water. Our rivers, beaches, creeks, ponds, pools, and extensive network of waterways are among our greatest assets, but they also present public safety risks that require continued attention, education, and collaboration. Two very recent tragedies in our community underscore those risks.

Accordingly, I am establishing a Special Committee on Drowning Prevention to examine opportunities for the City to reduce drownings, particularly those involving retention pond and stormwater facilities, through improved public information, prevention, infrastructure, regulatory standards, enforcement, and interagency coordination. The Committee is charged with evaluating the City's current drowning prevention efforts and developing practical recommendations in the following areas:

- 1. Emergency Response and Data.** Review available data regarding drownings, near drownings, water rescues, and other water related incidents in Duval County to identify recurring hazards, geographic concentrations, populations at elevated risk, and opportunities to strengthen prevention and emergency response.
- 2. Prevention, Public Education and Awareness.** Review existing City and community water safety education efforts and identify opportunities for a coordinated public service information campaign addressing retention pond and stormwater drowning prevention, elopement risks, and other preventative measures applicable to water hazards.
- 3. Youth, Elopement, and Special Needs Water Safety.** Evaluate risks associated with children, children and adults with autism, and people with other developmental disabilities who may be prone to wandering, and identify reasonable measures to reduce the likelihood of accidental drowning. These could include perimeter and early alert technology opportunities, awareness of and access to swimming lessons, CPR education, and other programs designed for children – particularly those with special needs.

- 4. Public Residential Retention and Stormwater Facility Safety.** Review and evaluate existing standards and water safety conditions at City-owned and privately-owned/maintained stormwater and retention ponds, to include signage, perimeter, and early alert technology opportunities where appropriate, rescue equipment, emergency information, risk-based safety assessments, enforcement authority, and other reasonable preventative measures.
- 5. Interagency and Community Partnerships.** Engage appropriate City departments, independent authorities, public safety agencies, healthcare professionals, stormwater engineering professionals, Homeowners Associations, developers, St. Johns River Water Management District representatives, drowning prevention experts, schools, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood representatives, and affected families to identify best practices and opportunities for collaboration.
- 6. Best Practices, Legislative Authority and Recommendations.** Examine successful water safety and drowning prevention initiatives implemented in other communities and recommend cost effective policies, programs, public information strategies, or legislative actions appropriate for the City of Jacksonville.

Given the importance of this work, the Special Committee will be chaired by Council Member Reggie Gaffney, Jr. and include Council Member Tyrone Clark-Murray (Vice Chair) and Council Member Mike Gay. The Committee should place particular emphasis on prevention through education and public awareness, recognizing that timely, understandable information can equip parents, children, families of children with special needs, and residents to make safe decisions around ponds and other bodies of water. The Committee will submit a final report with recommendations for legislation, if applicable, to the Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health, and Safety Committee no later than December 31, 2026.

Jacksonville's relationship with the water is fundamental to who we are as a community. Our goal should be to ensure that residents and visitors can enjoy that relationship as safely as possible while focusing City resources on practical measures that can save lives.

Thank you to Council Member Gaffney and the Special Committee members for your leadership on this issue. I look forward to receiving your recommendations.

Please send any inquiries to Amber Lehman at alehman@coj.net.

Cc: CITYC@COJ.NET