



THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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'We'll know our fate August 13'

Recommendation due on land for Castillo center

City Manager John Regan, negotiating memorandums of understanding with the University of Florida (UF) and the National Park Service (NPS), told city commissioners Monday night "by August 13 we will know our fate" on state lands here necessary for a Castillo Visitor Information Center in our Colonial Spanish Quarter.

That's when the state Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) meets to prepare a recommendation to the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Governor and Cabinet) on transferring a portion of land in the Quarter which, together with city-owned land, can provide a site for the Castillo Center.

"There are many moving parts," Regan admitted. "The city wants the land donated, but DEP (the Department of Environmental Protection) wants the city to be obligated to replace the land, either with other land or its \$588,000 value."

Mayor Joe Boles said completing a site to be donated to the National Park Service for the center is critical. "Our goal has always been to tap into the 750,000 Castillo visitors with joint ticket sales for the Quarter and Castillo. The center in the Quarter can make that happen."

Regan noted a second deadline - October 31 - to get funds in the federal budget for the center.

ARC is an 11-member group representing five state agencies, four appointees of the Governor, and one appointee each by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Agriculture and Consumer Services. ARC evaluates, selects and ranks state land acquisition projects on the Florida Forever priority list, as well as reviewing management plans and land uses for all state-owned conservation lands.



Government House public ceremonial area in university negotiations

Food tops 450 voting

Voting for program and project ideas on the 450 Community Corps website indicates there will be plenty for commemoration committees to do.

A period food festival, St. Augustine paper currency and coins, a Regatta, a replica 16th century ship, and U. S. Commemorative Stamps and Coins are among the most popular so far.

Other high-ranking choices include a Bayfront Bandshell, Period Clothes Closet, Lincolnville, a St. Augustine Film Commission, The Colonial Capitols of Florida, The Lightner Ball, The Mission Period, and Tour Guide Training.

The website's [Idea Vault](#) describes dozens of ideas submitted by our community, and voting gives an idea of our community's favorites.

Photo: 16th century food display at recent event

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Dedicating the east side of Government House for "public and ceremonial activities" is among potential elements in continuing negotiations with the University Florida (UF) - now managing 34 state-owned historic properties here.

City Manager John Regan updated city commissioners Monday night on negotiations with UF. Our city is hoping to retain management of our Colonial Spanish Quarter and Government House.

Progress on negotiations for memorandums of understanding with both the University of and the National Park Service were part of a commission agenda that included discussions of regulation of special events in short-term rental property, a boating no-wake zone along the bayfront, and efforts to improve cleanup in the historic district, and word that \$400,000 in grants will be provided to dredge Salt Run from the Conch House to the Lighthouse boat ramp.

Cleaning up downtown

Smarting under recent complaints by visitors and residents, Public Works Director Martha Graham told commissioners she's creating "cross-functional training" to develop teams for heightened cleaning in high visitor areas.

"It's driving us crazy that the downtown, especially St. George Street, is getting dirtier," City Manager John Regan said.

"This is our living room," Commissioner Crichlow added. "We've never put the effort into it that's needed."

Special events in rental properties

Commissioners ordered development of regulations after Commissioner Leanna Freeman reported on meetings with Water Street area residents complaining of large gatherings for wedding receptions and the like in that area. Planning and Building Director Mark Knight said such regulations could include registration of such properties and limiting the number of people at events.

No wake zone along bayfront

"It's amazing that the criteria for no-wake zones has nothing to do with wakes," Commissioner Don Crichlow remarked as General Services Director Jim Piggott outlined steps necessary for state and federal approval.

The request was made recently to protect boats in mooring fields being installed in the bay and Salt Run. Piggott was directed to continue efforts to secure necessary approvals.

City Manager John Regan added a positive note - the Florida Inland Navigation District has approved \$300,000 and the Port and Waterway Authority \$100,000 to dredge Salt Run from the Conch House to the Lighthouse boat ramp - "an area that's never been dredged," he said.

Commission reviews draft carriage ordinance

Horse urine, city expenses, and horse carriage routes were among elements weighed by our City Commission in a 1 1/2 hour workshop on a draft horse carriage ordinance before its regular meeting Monday.

The workshop played out before a filled Alcazar Room, but there was no public comment as commission workshops are designed for commissioners to discuss city matters outside of the formality of regular meetings. No official actions can be taken at commission workshops.

Assistant City Attorney Carlos Mendoza, point man on the effort, called on legal, financial, and public works officials to support elements in the draft ordinance, the second he's prepared after getting input from carriage businesses and a public forum.

Proposed is allowing a maximum of 25 carriage permits at \$1,000 each, the \$25,000 offsetting an estimated \$22,000 a year in city costs for street repairs and cleaning after horse droppings. An alternate is a 2 1/2 percent franchise fee on carriage business income, which Commissioner Leanna Freeman said would be cumbersome to audit.

A proposed new route for horse carriages, reversing the current direction, would take away the Kodak moments of horse carriages along the bayfront, but also eliminate bayfront hazard areas with four lanes of traffic. Mendoza said city bed and breakfast businesses weighed in, and a "charter carriage" element was revised to allow carriages to go off route for pickups without prior notice to the city.

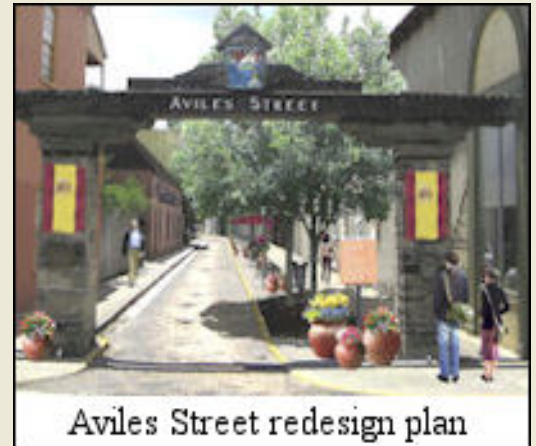
Before makeover, a 'Fiesta de Aviles'

Making lemonade of lemons, folks along Aviles Street plan a fiesta Friday before closing the city's oldest street to give it an historic facelift.

The day of activities begins right after 9 a.m. ceremonies marking the start of the project from King Street to Artillery Lane. While closed to traffic during the work, sidewalks and businesses will remain open.

The project begins Monday, and is expected to continue for six to seven weeks.

The work will include utility replacement and underground wiring, rebricking the street, and widening the sidewalk over former parking spaces to allow outdoor dining.



Revising our lesser known history

Derek Hankerson emerged several years back in efforts to include St. Augustine in the National [Underground Railroad Network to Freedom](#) and the [Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor](#), both programs of the National Park Service.

It would be only the beginning of his efforts to bring to light the significance of multicultural history here and in the Caribbean. Leaving his job with the county, he formed Freedom Road LLC with friend and Freedom Road Creative Director James Bullock.

St. Augustine and Fort Mose, America's first free black settlement, are now part of the railroad network - establishing that the underground railroad in fact began running south in the 1700s - and Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor commissioners have agreed to add St. Augustine to the corridor management plan, extending the corridor from Wilmington NC to St. Augustine.

Michael Allen, NPS coordinator for the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, will bring that news to St. Augustine in August.

Other projects on Derek's plate, Haitian American Historical Society events, expanded trade



with the Caribbean rim being developed with State Senator Tony Hill, web-based travel and tour packages for multicultural visitors, a book draft-titled *Mis-Education of Americans*, and a grave stone and historic marker at Tolomato Cemetery for the Haitian revolutionary and Spanish General, Jorge Biassou.

"My German wife and my mother inspired me to follow my boyhood dream, from the family dinner table at the age of 10," to uncover forgotten history, Derek says.

History's Highlights

General Biassou enlivened St. Augustine

One in a series of historic features as we prepare for our commemorations, drawn from research by George Gardner.

5 years, 1 month, and 13 days to St. Augustine's 450th anniversary

He looked more like a king, parading into town with his wife and twenty-three Haitian followers. General Jorge Biassou, Haitian rebel leader promoted and assigned to St. Augustine in 1796 by the Spanish Government, wore gold-trimmed clothes, a silver saber, and an ivory dagger. He called the followers his "family" because of their loyalty and dependence on him.

On their arrival, Governor Juan Nepomuceno deQuesada provided a French-Spanish interpreter and two nights' dinner for Biassou's immediate family. Through the interpreter, Biassou sent thanks, but complained that he wasn't invited to eat at Government House. The governor was stunned.



Biassou entourage at his home on St. George Street. Painting by Alexandra Barbot

In the first few weeks, St. Augustine locals hung around outside Biassou's rented house on St. George Street to stare at the "family." Biassou complained again. Biassou liked attention on his own terms. He hosted a festival for the town's black community to celebrate the Catholic Day of Kings with an African flair. The Spanish Catholics were stunned.

Biassou's life in Florida was like a retirement compared to his days as the fiery leader of the Haitian slave revolt against the French. He chose to spend his impressive income on impressive hospitality. But even though his salary was second only to the governor, it fell short of what Havana promised him because of St. Augustine's frequent inability to cover payroll.

Nor had Biassou adjusted to the loss of respect in his transition from war general to border patrol, commanding a small black militia at Fort Matanzas, not an army of thousands.

Jorge Biassou died in 1801 at the age of sixty. Recognition for his position as a decorated officer of Spain took center stage, even superseding current racial distinctions. Father O'Reilly honored him with a Catholic mass. The governor accompanied the funeral procession to Tolomato Cemetery with drummers and a black honor guard. St. Augustine's public notary recorded that "*every effort was made to accord him the decency due an officer Spain had recognized for military heroism.*"

Most of Tolomato's grave markers were wooden and have long since disappeared. The exact location of Jorge Biassou's gravesite is unknown.

From an account by Amy Howard at www.augustine.com

The St. Augustine Report is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The Report at gardner@aug.com

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