

Beaches Watch Vision, Mission & Core Values

Beaches Watch Vision

Beaches residents are educated, motivated and inspired to express their informed opinions and cooperatively participate in the governing process.

Beaches Watch Mission Statement

Beaches Watch facilitates educated and productive citizen involvement in government decisions that impact the quality of life of our beaches communities in Duval County, FL.

We achieve this by raising, monitoring and researching issues; providing factual issue information to the general public and government officials; encouraging citizen participation in the solutions to beaches growth and quality of life issues and organizing citizens for action.

Beaches Watch Core Values

- Improving participation in local government
- Well informed residents
- Positive and constructive input on issues
- Factual information on issues
- Respectful and professional involvement
- Fairness and objectivity
- Non-partisanship

Board Member Expectations

1. Support the mission of the organization:
 - a) Raise, monitor and research beaches issues;
 - b) Provide factual issue information to the general public and government officials;
 - c) Encourage citizen participation in the solutions to beaches growth and quality of life issues and organizing citizens for action
2. Attend Beaches Watch monthly meetings, Board meetings in accordance with bylaws, programs and special events.
3. Attend area meetings and other meetings assigned by the President.
4. Assist in developing organizational policies and strategic planning.
5. Maintain confidentiality of the Board's meetings.
6. Serve actively on committees and perform functions or special projects assigned by the President.
7. Year-round board member recruitment, orientation and assessment.
8. Year-round membership recruitment.
9. Outreach and advocacy to enhance the organization's public standing.
10. Assist other Board members as needed.
11. Other duties as assigned.

History of Beaches Watch

High-Rise Development Comes to Northeast Florida

High-rise development came late to Northeast Florida, relatively speaking. While most of south Florida experienced moderate high-rise growth during the 50s, the beaches area of Jacksonville was not considered an attractive area for condominium development. Indeed, many often referred to Jacksonville Beach as “blighted.” Efforts to attract redevelopment investment to the area were ineffective. However, the late 70s and 80s saw a few high-rise buildings being built. It wasn’t until the mid 90s that we began to notice beachfront mom and pop motels and cottages were being sold to developers to construct high-rise buildings.

In 2003, the owners of Beach Marine contracted with the Devlin Corporation to purchase and develop the marina. The Devlin Corporation developed plans to construct 550 condominium units comprising five buildings at 90 feet. The project also included plans to privatize the marina. In the Fall of 2003 a newspaper advertisement showing the scope and size of the condominium project got the attention of beaches’ residents and city government. Shortly thereafter, the Beach Marine owners and the Devlin Corporation submitted a development application to the Jacksonville Beach City Council asking for permission to go forward with the project.

Concerned Citizens Mobilize

Concerned about the negative impacts by such a large development, citizens began distributing flyers to their Jacksonville Beach neighbors to educate them on the proposed development and to encourage them to contact their city council members to deny the proposed development. The determined group of citizens worked tirelessly to convince citizens that their voice mattered and they could influence the city council. During rush hour the night before the council meeting, citizens waved signs on Beach Blvd. across from the marina, encouraging citizens to attend the city council meeting to oppose the development plan.

As a result, the first city council meeting was attended by hundreds of citizens speaking out against the project. The council, reluctant to approve such a large development, asked that the project be scaled down. Beach Marine and the Devlin Corporation offered many concessions at a second city council meeting, including an offer to give the city marshland it owned north of the marina, but refused to scale down the project. Finding that the proposed development did not fit with the character of the beach community, the city council unanimously denied the development request and Devlin cancelled their plans.

Citizens Sponsor Charter Amendment to Control Overdevelopment

Citizens concerned about overdevelopment in Jacksonville Beach began to research mechanisms to control high-rise development. In 2004, Beaches Watch was formed initially as a Political Action Committee (PAC) to sponsor a charter amendment that would limit building height to 35 feet in Jacksonville Beach. In order to ensure citizen-control over height limits, not the city government, a petition to place the amendment on the 2004 election ballot was launched. Within one month, Beaches Watch obtained enough signatures to certify that the amendment would be placed on the November ballot.

The amendment did not go unopposed. The city council formed its own Height Study Committee and the business community established their own organization called Beaches Vision. Both groups labored to convince the citizens to their point of view. The end result was that over 76% of the citizens favored the 35-

foot height amendment and over 69% voted “No” to the cities amendment. It was a solid vote supporting height restrictions in Jacksonville Beach. Although the height amendment was challenged in court by the development community, it was upheld.

Beaches Watch Organizes to Keep Citizens Involved in Quality of Life Issues

Shortly after the passage of the Jacksonville Beach height referendum, the Beaches Watch PAC was dissolved and Beaches Watch, a non-profit 501(c)4 corporation was formed to promote educated and productive citizen involvement in Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach and Jacksonville Beach quality of life issues.

Since the formation of Beaches Watch, our organization has provided these valuable services to our beaches communities:

- Annual candidate forums for local elections to give voters the opportunity to hear the candidates and make an informed choice.
- Educational programs for the beaches communities: Understanding the EAR Process, St. Johns River Water Withdrawal, Hurricane Preparedness, How to Protect Your Children from Predators, and monthly meeting speakers on relevant beaches topics. Monthly meetings are held first Wednesday of each month.
- Yearly recognition of individuals, businesses or organizations for their exemplary contributions to the beaches’ quality of life with the ‘Friend of the Beaches Award.’
- Annual Beaches Give-Back donation presented to a beaches nonprofit organization enriching the quality of life for the beaches community.
- Educational issues information provided to beaches citizens via email and the Beaches Watch web site.

Beaches Watch continues to be the major information vehicle at the beach regarding community issues. Through our efforts, improved communication between citizens and elected officials has resulted in many positive outcomes for the communities. Some of the key local issues in which Beaches Watch has been involved include:

- Jacksonville Beach 35-foot height amendment
- Jacksonville Beach downtown visioning
- Jacksonville Beach Home Depot project
- Jacksonville Beach waste transfer station
- Jacksonville Beach Perry property development proposal
- Jacksonville Beach downtown safety concerns
- Atlantic Beach community character ordinance
- Atlantic Beach district representation
- Johnston Island development
- Neptune Beach Walmart
- Mayport cruise ship terminal and redevelopment plan
- Kernan Road overpass
- Preservation of Beach Marine marshland
- St. Johns River water withdrawal proposal
- Support of Florida Forever Funding
- Atlantic Beach sewer line project (Estates of Atlantic Beach)

Our organization’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2004, Beaches Watch was awarded the “Community Activism Award” by the *Northeast Florida Sierra Club*; and in 2006 Beaches Watch was awarded the “Community Steward Award” by the state’s growth-watchdog group, *1000 Friends of Florida*.