

Agenda Item: 2.a

Meeting Date: June 2, 2026

MEMORANDUM

To: City Commission

Through:

From: Nicole Delfino

Date: 2026-06-02

Subject: Dunedin Causeway Usage Discussion

Presenter(s): Jorge Quintas, Deputy City Manager; Tony Mulkey, Director of Parks and Recreation; Theresa Smalling, Director of HR & Risk Management; Chief Michael Handoga and Nicole Delfino, Strategy & Sustainability Manager

Staff Recommendation: Review usage of Dunedin Causeway and environmental impacts. Provide consensus direction for further usage discussion.

Strategic Themes: Environmental Resiliency & Sustainability

Boards & Committees: Dunedin Causeway and Coastal Waterways Committee
Marine Advisory Committee

Budget Impact: \$0

Past Action: In October 2025, Pinellas County presented to the City of Dunedin Commission on the proposed flow of traffic and status of the causeway damage and repairs following the 2024 storms (Helene & Milton).

Next Action: Review of proposed ordinance language based on Commission direction.

Attachments: [A. Dunedin Causeway Usage Review June 2 2026.pdf](#)
[B. Ordinance 14-21_Section 54-32.pdf](#)
[C. April 2026 County Reponse RE_ Dunedin Causeway Motorized Watercraft.pdf](#)
[D. Dunedin Causeway PCSO Calls for Service \(Jetski Related\).pdf](#)
[E. Dunedin_Causeway_Fire and Rescue_Final_Infographic.pdf](#)
[F. Sierra Club Memo - Dunedin Causeway Policy for Non-Motorized Watercraft Launch.pdf](#)
[G. Tampa Bay Estuary Letter Re Seagrass May 2026.pdf](#)

Background:

The Dunedin Causeway has historically served as one of the City's most active recreational waterfront destinations. Over the past several decades, the City of Dunedin and Pinellas County have evaluated the impacts associated with vessel launching and motorized watercraft operations along the Causeway shoreline, particularly related to environmental protection, shoreline stability, public safety, and recreational conflicts among users.

Recent storm impacts, shoreline restoration efforts, and increasing concerns regarding seagrass damage and safety conflicts have presented an opportunity for the City Commission to revisit and assess the recreational usage of the Dunedin Causeway.

The Dunedin Causeway and bridge were constructed in 1963 and have long functioned as a regional recreational destination. Recreational access is generally permitted daily from 5:00 a.m. through 11:00 p.m.

Historically, portions of the Causeway have accommodated both motorized and non-motorized vessel launching activities. However, concerns regarding congestion, environmental impacts, and shoreline degradation have been discussed for decades.

In 1990, the Dunedin City Commission reportedly discussed and tentatively supported restrictions on the launching and retrieval of motorized watercraft from portions of the Causeway shoreline. Over the years, additional planning efforts continued to evaluate long-term use and management of the Causeway, including: the 2005 Causeway Master Plan; 2012 Causeway Corridor Study and 2014 Waterfront Task Force Report.

In 2014, the City adopted Ordinance 14-21, Section 54-32, regulating the operation and launching of watercraft from the Dunedin Causeway Beach. The ordinance established the City's authority to regulate recreational motorized and non-motorized usage based on the waterway designations. The current ordinance designates prohibited launch zones; motorized and non-motorized watercraft activities; no-wake and restricted speed zones; and areas designated for specific recreational uses.

Under the current configuration, designated areas on the south side of the Causeway permit launching of both motorized and non-motorized watercraft. No vessel launching is permitted on the north side west of the causeway per County Ordinance.

In 2019, Pinellas County adopted Ordinance 19-29 related to the protection of the County's aquatic preserve system and prevention of seagrass damage. The ordinance specifically acknowledges that careless vessel operation and dredging pose significant risks to seagrass beds and sensitive marine habitats.

At that time, Pinellas County restricted vessel launching activities along the north side of the Causeway due to repeated environmental damage and ongoing repair costs associated with sensitive shoreline areas.

The waters surrounding the Dunedin Causeway contain extensive seagrass beds and shallow marine habitats that support fish populations, marine wildlife, manatees, and shorebirds. Regional environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club and Tampa Bay Estuary Program, have identified the area as environmentally sensitive and vulnerable to impacts from propeller scarring, turbidity, and shoreline erosion caused by motorized vessel activity.

Following the temporary closure of portions of the Causeway after the 2024 hurricane season, local organizations and stakeholders observed apparent improvements in seagrass conditions, shoreline stabilization, and marine habitat recovery.

During the 2024 hurricane season, portions of the south side shoreline experienced significant storm damage and erosion, resulting in temporary closures and shoreline instability.

In response, Pinellas County implemented circulation and access modifications in 2025, including one-way traffic circulation measures for improved public safety and are working to address the erosion through beach renourishment, erosion control, and shoreline restoration projects. These erosion control projects were approved in early 2026 by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissions and work began thereafter. The completion date is indicated on the project page as December 2026, but Pinellas County staff have indicated work on the southside of the causeway may be complete as early as July 2026.

Public safety has also become a significant factor in discussions regarding vessel launching activities on the Causeway. Data provided by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office identified approximately 80 jet ski-related incidents between January 2022 and April 2026. Reported incidents included launching in unauthorized zones, operation within swim areas, violations of no-motorized zones, speeding and wake-related concerns, and unsafe operation near passive recreational users.

Additionally, Dunedin Fire Rescue documented more than 3,200

calls for service on the Causeway between January 2021 and May 2026, including boating incidents, water rescues, medical emergencies, and trauma-related responses.

Public safety concerns remain as to the compatibility of high-speed motorized launches within areas heavily utilized by swimmers, kayakers, paddleboarders, and other passive recreational users.

Throughout 2025 and 2026, City staff coordinated with Pinellas County regarding authority and management considerations associated with vessel launching activities on the Causeway. Correspondence from Pinellas County officials confirmed the City has authority regarding vessel launching activities on the south side of the Causeway and further, Pinellas County would support the City taking action to restrict motorized watercraft launching in environmentally sensitive shoreline areas. County staff also indicated support for potential shoreline resiliency improvements and living shoreline concepts in portions of the Causeway area.

The history of vessel launching at the Dunedin Causeway reflects an ongoing balance between recreational access, environmental stewardship, shoreline resiliency, and public safety. Over time, both the City and County have incrementally implemented regulations and operational changes intended to better manage these competing interests.

Recent storm recovery efforts, environmental observations, and increasing recreational use conflicts have renewed community and policy discussions regarding the future management of motorized watercraft launching along the Causeway shoreline.

At this time, City Staff recommend the City Commission move forward with amending Ordinance 14-21, section 54-32, to prohibit launching of motorized watercraft along the Dunedin Causeway. This would occur through an ordinance review process, whereby an ordinance amendment would be presented to City Commission for review at a future meeting. Any changes to an ordinance would follow the required protocols for ordinance modification, including two public meetings and two public notices, including advertisement as required by law.