

Agenda Item: 3.a

Meeting Date: September 3, 2026

MEMORANDUM

To: City Commission

Through: Jennifer K. Bramley, City Manager

From: Nicole Delfino

Date: 2026-07-23

Subject: Second Reading of Ordinance 26-08, an ordinance amending the City of Dunedin Code of Ordinances to prohibit launching motorized watercraft from the Dunedin Causeway Beach to protect the shoreline, reduce negative environmental impacts and improve overall user safety.

Presenter(s): Tony Mulkey, Director of Parks and Recreation; and Nicole Delfino, Strategy & Sustainability Manager

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of Second Reading of Ordinance 26-08.

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).

On June 2, 2026, City Staff presented to Commission on the usage history of the Dunedin Causeway. City Commission provided consensus direction to move forward with an ordinance restricting motorized watercraft from launching on the Dunedin Causeway Beach.

On July 23, 2026, City Commission approved First reading of Ordinance 26-08 with a 4-0 vote (with Vice Mayor Walker excused absent from the meeting).

Next Action: Implementation of policy update - required signage and

enforcement.

Attachments:

A. Dunedin Causeway Ordinance_Second Reading 9.3.26.pdf
B. Dunedin Ordinance 26-08 Prohibiting Motorized Watercraft Launches from Dunedin Causeway Beach.pdf
C. City of Dunedin Business Impact Statement for Ordinance 26-08 Dunedin Causeway Beach.pdf
D. Existing Ordinance 14-21 Section 54-32.pdf
E. CCWC_Motorized_Watercraft_Memo_with_City_Code.pdf
F. Pinellas County Reponse RE Dunedin Causeway Motorized Watercraft.pdf
G. Sailability Letter Re Dunedin Causeway.pdf
H. Sierra Club Memo Dunedin Causeway Policy for Non-Motorized Watercraft Launch.pdf
I. Tampa Bay Estuary Letter Re Seagrass May 2026.pdf
J. Windlasses Letter Re Dunedin Causeway.pdf
K. DBCA Letter -Prohibit Launching of Motorized Vessels from Causeway 2026.pdf
L. Letter of Support From Royal Stewart Arms Condominiums.pdf
M. Legal Ad Ordinance 26-08 July 15.pdf
N. Legal Ad Ordinance 26-08 August 28.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 many years.

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.

During the 2024 hurricane season, portions of the south side shoreline experienced significant storm damage and erosion, resulting in temporary closures and shoreline instability. Following the temporary closure of portions of the Causeway after the 2024 hurricane season, local organizations and stakeholders observed noticeable improvements in seagrass conditions, shoreline stabilization, and marine habitat recovery.

In 2025, Pinellas County implemented circulation and access modifications, 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. Two jet ski related deaths occurred in this period. 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. Ordinance 26-08 is being presented by City Staff to amend the existing ordinance to restrict motorized launching of watercraft at the Dunedin Causeway Beach.

The first reading of Ordinance 26-08 is being presented to Commission on July 23, 2026. The ordinance has followed proper advertising requirement for a first reading. The second reading is tentatively scheduled for September and will also include a proper advertising period to adhere to legal requirements.

Should the City Commission adopt Ordinance 26-08 and motorized watercraft launching become prohibited throughout the Dunedin Causeway, enforcement will be handled by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. Enforcement will follow the City's current code requirements provided in Section 54-37 and Section 1-15. Per Dunedin Code of Ordinances, Chapter 54, Section 54-37: Penalty for violation of article.

Any person violating the provisions of this article, upon conviction, shall be punished by the same penalty as is therefor provided by the laws of the state, but in no case shall the penalty exceed the punishment provided in section 1-15 of this Code. This shall be a class V violation of the county court uniform fine schedule for local ordinance violations. (Ord. No. 14-21, Â§ 1, 10-23-2014)

A Class V violation is \$93 uncontested and \$138 contested. See Administrative Order No 2018-068 which defines the Uniform Fine Schedule:

<https://www.jud6.org/LegalCommunity/LegalPractice/AOSAndRule068.pdf>.

Per Dunedin Code of Ordinances, Chapter 1, Section 1-15: General penalties; continuing violations.

It shall be unlawful for any person to violate or fail to comply with any provision of this Code; and where no specific penalty is provided therefor, the violation of any provision of this Code shall be punished by a fine not exceeding \$500.00 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 60 days, or by both such fine and imprisonment. Each day any violation of any provision of this Code shall continue shall constitute a separate offense. (Code 1977, Â§ 1-8)