

MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #IV.A

DATE: JULY 20, 2026

TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS

FROM: STAFF

SUBJECT: SFRPC / TCRPC JOINT CONFERENCE UPDATE

Council staff will provide an update on the SFRPC / TCRPC Joint Conference Agenda. The Conference working title is “Blue Tech Jobs: Policy, Investment, and Workforce Development in Southeast Florida”.

This conference is scheduled for October 30th at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Mary N. Porter Riverview Ballroom, 201 SW 5th Avenue, in Fort Lauderdale.

Recommendation:

Information only.



STAFF WORKING DRAFT

Blue Tech Jobs: Policy, Investment, and Workforce Development in Southeast Florida

*A Joint Conference of the South Florida Regional Planning Council and
the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council*

October 30, 2026

**Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Mary N. Porter Riverview Ballroom
201 SW 5th Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33312**

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Conference Goals:

- Assess the potential for expansion of Blue Tech in Southeast Florida
- Understand the challenges or potential obstacles hindering the expansion of Blue Tech
- Identify best practices to advance Blue Tech particularly through local government land use and regulation
- Facilitate a broad, multi-sector, regional conversation about potential next steps including opportunities to work together to further Blue Tech in Southeast Florida.

8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Registration and Networking (30 min)

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m. Welcome

- **SFRPC Chair Senator René García & TCRPC Chair Commissioner Maria Marino**

9:10 – 9:15 Conference Framing (5 min)

Opening remarks on what is Blue Tech and why Blue Tech matters to Southeast Florida's ocean economy, workforce strategy, and joint regional economic development priorities.

- **Senator Geller, Chair, SFRPC CEDS Committee**

9:15 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Blue Tech Implementation Overview (10 min plus 5 min Q&A)

Brief presentation connecting the CEDS process to the Blue Tech Jobs agenda, defining and framing Blue Tech as the innovation layer of the regional ocean economy, identifying the implementation questions for the day, and summarizing the local government survey.

- **Randy Deshazo**, Deputy Director; Director of Economic Development and Research, South Florida Regional Planning Council

9:30 a.m. – 10:25 a.m. Panel 1: What Blue Tech Companies Do in Southeast Florida (50 min plus 5 min Q&A)

This panel will showcase Blue Tech through company examples rather than abstract definitions. The focus will be on local firms, products, services, and technologies. Speakers will explain what they build, who buys it, how it helps ports, local governments, coastal managers, researchers, or private industry, and where public sector involvement may be useful.

Potential Speakers:

- *Moderator:* **Bob Swindell**, President and CEO, Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance
- **Bonnie Schneider**, Skywind Solutions
Topic: Weather data for ports.
- **Nick Bourdon**, Reef Arches, Palm Bay.
Topic: Shoreline Infrastructure.
- **Anya Freeman or Charlotte Hoffman**, Kind Designs
Topic: Permitting for shoreline infrastructure.
- **Don Darling**, President, SeaRobotics Corporation, Martin County.
Topic: Unmanned surface vehicles used for hydrographic surveys, environmental monitoring, security, and scientific research worldwide.
- **John Jacobson**, CEO, Advanced Ocean Systems, Martin County
Topic: Oceanographic instrumentation, autonomous systems, sensors, and engineering solutions for government, defense, and research customers
- **Edie Widder, Ph.D.**, CEO and Senior Scientist, Ocean Research and Conservation Association (ORCA), Indian River County.
Topic: Environmental sensors, water quality monitoring, artificial intelligence and data analytics, and citizen science to improve lagoon management
- **Raquel De Antonio**, Sargassum Eco Lumber
Topic: Sargassum-based lumber products.
- **Speaker to be identified**, Algas Organics
Topic: Algas Fiber

- **Speaker to be identified**, ShoreWorks, Monroe County

Topic: Shoreline erosion control solutions

10:25 a.m. – 10:40 a.m. Networking Break (15 min)

10:40 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Panel 2: Workforce, Credentials, and Employer Commitments (40 min plus 10 min Q&A)

Focus on the workforce systems needed to support Blue Tech job growth. Topics will include credentials, apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, employer commitments, university and college pathways, and workforce board programs. The Florida Office of Ocean Economy is working in this area, and workforce development boards can contribute to the panel discussion.

Potential Speakers:

- **Moderator (proposed): Kelly Smallridge**, President and CEO, Business Development Board of Palm Beach County. Potential Alternate: Pete Tesch, former President, Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, a county with substantial marine-based activity.
- **Colin Polsky, Ph.D.**, Florida Atlantic University
Topic: Workforce Innovation Network and the Florida Office of Ocean Economy.
- **Terri-Ann Brown**, Miami Tech Works
Topic: Workforce innovation.
- **Jonathan Gueverra, Ph.D.**, President and CEO, The College of the Florida Keys
Topic: Credential Programs.
- **Speaker to be identified**, Broward College
Topic: Marine Engineering Department.
- **Port Representative:** Port Everglades, Port of Palm Beach, PortMiami, or Port of Fort Pierce.
Topic: What skill sets are needed for the Port Workforce of the Future?
- **Ted Astolfi, CEO**, Economic Council of Martin County
Topic: Water filtration technology
- **Speaker to be identified**, Chapman School of Seamanship, Martin County.
Topic: Merchant Marine, Coast Guard, and marine credentialing.
- **Rod Miller**, Beacon Council
Topic: TBD

11:30 a.m. – 12:35 p.m. Lunch and Keynote (65 min)

- *Keynote, 11:35 a.m. – 12:05 p.m. (30 min): Alison Barlow*, Executive Director, St. Petersburg Innovation District
- *Lunch, 12:05 p.m. – 12:35 p.m. (30 min)*

12:35 p.m. – 1:40 p.m. Panel 3: Regulatory Pathways, Permitting, and Local Government Tools (50 min plus 15 min Q&A)

This panel will examine the regulatory and land use tools that could help Blue Tech companies test, deploy, and scale technologies in Southeast Florida. Topics may include permitting pathways, pilot deployment zones, temporary approvals, flexible zoning, model ordinance concepts, and lessons from the St. Petersburg Innovation District or similar models.

Potential Speakers:

- *Moderator: James Kohnstamm*, Director of Economic Development, Miami-Dade County.
(Knowledgeable about multi-county perspectives and the Risk and Resilience Tech Hub)

Identify appropriate County staff from the seven-county Southeast Florida region.

1:40 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Panel 4: Research, Commercialization, and Capital (45 min plus 5 min Q&A)

This panel will explore research-to-market and commercialization. Topics may include university research, commercialization pathways, port or local government demonstration projects, corporate partnerships, federal and state funding, venture capital, and what makes a Blue Tech company investable or bankable. A corporate venture capital speaker could be included, paired with research, commercialization, or applied deployment speakers.

Potential Speakers:

- *Moderator: Katherine O'Fallon*, Executive Director, Marine Research Hub.
- **Kevin Cox, Ph.D.**, Director, Adams Center for Entrepreneurship, Florida Atlantic University.
- **Representative to be identified**, Nova Southeastern University Ocean Sciences, or the Levan Center of Innovation.
- **Daniel Kleinman**, Founder and CEO, Seaworthy Collective.
- **Susan Zellers and/or Millicent Pitts**, Ocean Exchange.
- **Representative to be identified**, Florida Oceanographic Society, Martin County
Topic: water quality and the aquarium and museum function.
- **Representative to be identified**, Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce, St. Lucie County.
- **Representative to be identified**, Tampa Bay Wave BlueTech|X Accelerator. Backed by a \$14 million federal grant, the accelerator connects early-stage ocean startups with active investors and strategic partners.
- **Note:** ORCA is also under consideration for this panel as an alternative to Panel 1 placement.
- **CORAL RESEARCH, PROPAGATION**

2:30 p.m. – 2:55 p.m. Implementation Discussion and Next Steps (25 min)

A closing session that identifies the next practical steps from the conference. Possible outputs include a Blue Tech policy blueprint, candidate pilot project areas, and workforce action items. A structured list of tangible, actionable next steps will be pre-drafted before the event.

Speakers:

- **Tom Lanahan**, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council. Proposed.
- **Isabel Cosio Carballo, MPA**, Executive Director, South Florida Regional Planning Council. Proposed.

2:55 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Closing Remarks (5 min)