

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

**URBAN SERVICES DISTRCT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**Don Davis Room, 1st floor, City Hall**

**December 13, 2019**

**2:30 p.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ann-Marie Knight (Chair), Frank Denton, Charles Griggs (dep. 3:18), Celestine Mills (arr. 2:44)

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements and Anthony Baltiero – Council Research Division; Sharonda Davis and Jessica Smith – Legislative Services Division

**Meeting Convened**: 2:36 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 6, 2019 meeting were **approved unanimously as distributed**.

Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Fund

The fund is a job creation and economic development fund addressing needs in the northwest area (north of Interstate 10, west of US 17/Main Street). The committee discussed to what extent the work of the NWJEDF relates to the needs the Urban Services District Committee has been discussing. Commissioner Griggs said it appeared to him that there was not an overall strategic vision for how the funds are expended, and he noted the number of defaults of supported projects in the report on the NWJEDF distributed by staff at the previous meeting. It is a vehicle for improvement in the area but seems to operate on a first come-first served basis as developers propose projects. The committee agreed to pose a question about the Fund’s investment strategy, if any, via correspondence with the NWJEDF board chair.

Independent Authorities

Jeff Clements made a presentation on the various types of City independent authorities. He described how the authorities differ in their creation mechanism, their board appointment authority (local versus state majority, mayor versus City Council), whether their budget is approved by the City Council or not, and whether the entity has an independent source of funding. The entities range from very independent of the City (the Duval County Public Schools, with an elected governing board and its own taxing authority) to very dependent on mayoral and/or City Council appointment of the board and on city budget appropriations.

Commissioner Griggs discussed federal opportunity zones, which provide federal tax credits for development in targeted areas. He said they exist in some places and not in others, so they aren’t consistent across the target area of the urban core.

Infrastructure Improvement Prioritization Methodologies

The group discussed 2 septic tank remediation priority lists provided by the Council Auditor’s Office – the Department of Health’s health threat potential ranking and the City’s ranking which takes into account both the Health Department priority list and additional factors, which includes whether or not the area was inside or outside the pre-consolidation City of Jacksonville. Chairwoman Knight will ask for further details on the ranking methodology and Commissioner Griggs asked that all of the listed projects include a notation of the City Council district for the committee’s information.

Commissioner Griggs departed at 3:18 p.m. for another meeting.

Guest Speakers

Kim Pryor, incoming chair of the Urban Core CPAC, recapped her comments from earlier in the day at the full commission meeting. She said that the CPACs can serve as a direct line of contact between the neighborhoods and the City and can bring neighborhood issues to the City’s attention. They can be a conduit of communication for citizens who may be uncomfortable speaking before a City Council or council committee meeting, but are more comfortable speaking in front of other neighborhood residents. She said that the executive order creating the CPACs seems to give them substantial power, but that fact is not recognized sometimes. There is frustration in the CPAC community about problems that come up over and over, but never seem to be solved. The CPACs that cover parts of the urban core are concerned about the unfulfilled promises of consolidation and see other parts of town getting more and better development than their neighborhoods that have been in the city for over 100 years. She feels that older neighborhoods get neglected in favor of newer parts of town. The CPACs need to get real, substantive power and to be respected by the city government.

In response to a question from Chairman Knight about what she feels is missing and what is needed to help the CPACs meet their objectives, Ms. Pryor said there is frustration that the CPACs raise issues and try to prod action, but things seem to take too long to happen. She said the CPACs all operate differently. They are supposed to meet quarterly with a representative of the Mayor’s Office. She said that often the appearances by City officials at CPAC meetings amount to delivering lists of activities undertaken (how many inspections performed, how many citations issued, where streets will be paved, etc.) and not real discussions of what the neighborhoods want to happen. Often they feel like their questions are not answered sufficiently by the City when posed, or take too long, or require multiple requests to eventually produce an answer. In response to a question from Commissioner Denton about how the word is spread about CPAC meetings and activities, Ms. Pryor said it’s a combination of social media presence and neighborhood representatives spreading the word among their civic association membership. With regard to council member participation in CPACs, she said that varies by the council person; some attend regularly, some don’t attend at all.

Paige Johnston discussed the Neighborhoods Department’s staffing of the 6 CPACs with 3 neighborhood coordinators and said that other City departmental employees (Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Neighborhoods) occasionally attend to provide reports and answer questions on issues. Ms. Pryor said that often information provided to the CPACs with regard to zoning and land use issues comes late or not at all, not giving the CPAC any time to respond in a timely manner. She said that she feels the City’s notification process to the CPACs is insufficient on many issues. Commissioner Mills suggested keeping a running list of items raised at each CPAC meeting and following up from month to month on what has been accomplished and what has not. She said that more transparency is needed and could be a place for the Charter Revision Commission to make a recommendation. Ms. Pryor said that the Mayor’s Office apparently has a spreadsheet listing issues raised by the CPACs (she saw it at one of the quarterly CPAC Chairs meetings with the Mayor’s Office), but it has not been shared with the CPACs. That would be a way for the CPACs to track what is being done about their issues. Chairwoman Knight said that she would be attending several CPAC meetings over the next month. Commissioner Denton asked if the quarterly meeting of the CPAC chairs with the Mayor’s Office is a noticed meeting open to the public. Ms. Pryor said that some attendees at CPAC meetings use their meetings as a venue for complaints as an alternative to calling the 630-CITY call center, which might not be the best use of everyone’s time. She said that the CPAC chairs have some ideas and would like to make a presentation to the committee about requested changes with regard to empowering CPACs. Commissioner Denton said that several representatives of the City had previously suggested that the CPACs be the foundation of or mechanism for implementing a City strategic planning process.

Eunice Barnum representing the Sherwood Forest Community Association and NOFLAP (Northeast Florida Accountability Forum Corporation) said that many areas have long been neglected by the City government. She cited comments by Florida Speaker of the House Richard Corcoran last year suggesting that tax increment financing districts have become “slush funds” for improper uses. The Community Redevelopment Area in her area was established in 2008 and for years the residents didn’t know what the redevelopment plan was and how funding was being used. She believes the CPACs were created to supplant or duplicate what the neighborhood associations used to do. Ms. Barnum noted the existence of a Neighborhood Bill of Rights and said that the government and elected officials are not abiding by it. Her area is covered by the King/Soutel CRA but they still have difficulty getting community improvements done. She believes the 19 council members should be responsible for conditions all over the city, not leaving it to the district council members to be solely responsible for what happens in their districts. They are often dissatisfied with how projects are done. She urged the Charter Revision Commission to find a way to put teeth into accountability for City actions.

The City’s Risk Management Division is unfair in how it refuses to pay claims for damage to vehicles caused by bad roads which are a countywide issue. Neglect is widespread and there doesn’t appear to be regular maintenance of roads, drainage ditches and sidewalks. Everything is a struggle with the City. Chairwoman Knight questioned how, or if, the CRAs mesh with the CPACs. Ms. Barnum said she doesn’t know of any involvement by the North CPAC in the King/Soutel CRA program. She will ask for more information on CRAs, their purpose and how they function. Commissioner Mills asked what the Urban Services Committee could recommend that would be helpful to the neighborhoods. Ms. Barnum said that a mechanism for accountability is absolutely needed. Some method needs to be devised to make sure the departments of the city government are fulfilling their responsibilities, which would alleviate many problems. Someone needs to track the departments’ work and make sure they’re doing what they’re funded to do. Also, they don’t know what the CRA budget is and what it’s really doing. Paige Johnston said that aside from the two downtown CRAs (run by the Downtown Investment Authority), the other CRA budgets are developed by the Office of Economic Development and adopted by the City Council as the CRA governing body. Ms. Johnston said that she would check with attorney Susan Grandin in her office who works regularly on CRA issues about what sort of reports are produced about CRA expenditures. Chairwoman Knight said that she would compile a list of questions developed by the committee today.

In response to a question, Paige Johnston said that she would forward a series of emails exchanged with Council Auditor Kyle Billy regarding the questions about the City’s spending patterns over the years and whether they have favored or disfavored particular parts of town.

Chairwoman Knight said that the committee needs to have discussion at its next meeting about what to do next and how to begin producing a work product. Two meetings are scheduled for January and more may be needed to get the work accomplished.

Public Comment

John Nooney said the Commission has great power and asked that a Charter amendment be proposed requiring the DIA and any CRA with a waterfront component be required to provide for public access to the waterways. 2007-451-E was passed 12 years ago. 2017-1-E regarding public trespass opens the door for citizens to have their boats seized.

Eunice Barnum said the CRA funds can only be spent within the CRA boundary and wants to know what happens if funds are spent outside the boundary.

Kim Pryor, speaking as a private citizen, asked that the Downtown Historic District be protected by Chapter 307, which it is not now. Seven downtown buildings are being demolished today after the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission found them not historic and approved their demolition in a hearing in September that was not properly noticed and didn’t give the general public any way to know what was happening.

**Meeting adjourned:** 4:30 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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Posted 12.17.19 5:00 p.m.