

**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**

**January 17, 2020**

**10:00 a.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ann-Marie Knight (Chair), Charles Griggs, Frank Denton, Celestine Mills

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements and Anthony Baltiero – Council Research Division; Jessica Matthews and Juliette Williams – Legislative Services Division

**Meeting Convened**: 10:03 a.m.

Presentation – Aundra Wallace, JAXUSA Partnership

Mr. Wallace, President of the JAXUSA Partnerhip, said that an area’s education rate (at least high school graduation rate), unemployment rate, household income and similar factors drive the kind of development that can be attracted to that area because developers want to see where they can recoup their investment and make a profit. Private investment follows public investment – roads, drainage, streetlights, etc. The public has to invest first and lay the groundwork before private developers will risk their capital and move in. Historically underdeveloped areas don’t typically have strong leadership and political clout like more economically advanced areas have, and therefore will be at a continual disadvantaged. Relentless positivity and continual effort needs to be applied over a course of many years to make any real progress. One challenge is that the need for long-term public investment in an area pits it against other areas that are “donor communities” that may resent the continual outflow of their tax dollars to impoverished communities. Another challenge is how to draw the boundaries of improvement areas, which should be done on the basis of an asset inventory – what public assets exist and who are the largest private landowners who have the biggest stake in the community (are they local or absentee owners?). Look at the City’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and determine when additional public investments are planned. Use planned CIP projects to attract private investment. Traffic patterns and speeds matter to commercial developers because of the ease or difficulty of access for potential customers. Federal and state resources (grants, tax credits, development programs) come and go as politicians change, so aren’t reliable over the long term. Local commitment is more dependable. A thriving Northwest Jacksonville is good for the whole city because a challenged Northwest area (poverty, crime) hurts the city’s reputation with the development and business community because of bad publicity.

Commissioner Mills asked about the significant amount of resources that will be needed to meet the infrastructure needs of the Northwest area. How is what the committee is proposing different than what the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Fund is doing? Ms. Mills commented on the fact that Mandarin has received much more money than the areas that need it more in the Northwest. She believes that the Northwest residents are seen as consumers and not producers. Ms. Mills fears that what the urban core investment authority would be trying to accomplish is exactly what the NWJEDF is already trying to do. She noted that a possibility of funding the NWJEDF more since they are already in place.

Mr. Denton commented on the unfulfilled promises of consolidation and noted some of the issues that are present within the Northwest area. He mentioned the different reasons for the subcommittee’s work. He applauded the city’s commitment to the downtown area and its investment in the Downtown Investment Authority to achieve the goals for downtown, and wondered about the possibility of creating a similar entity that could coordinate other entities and invest in the Urban Core area to foster redevelopment, community building, social service and educational improvements, etc. Is such an entity possible? Mr. Wallace outlined his “5 principles of change”: 1) talk about change; 2) organize for change, 3) formulate a path for change; 4) have a vision for change; 5) you must change yourself. Until those 5 things are in place, a new entity won’t succeed. The DIA succeeded because there was so much commitment and buy-in from government, civic and business leaders to make downtown vibrant for the sake of the whole city. You would need to have the same thing happen to make an urban redevelopment authority successful. Money is the key to everything – without resources you can’t be successful, and there has to be commitment for the long term (many, many years). It won’t work if the whole community isn’t committed to helping the urban core to be revitalized. The community committed to revitalizing downtown because it was vital to the city’s economic future in competition with cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Nashville and others.

Programs have to demand and measure success. Any projects incentivized must be viable and commercially successful on their own merits without too much government assistance. Any failures will reflect poorly on the revitalization effort and make the task more difficult because it will erode community trust and commitment. A dedicated, focused agency is good for revitalization, but it will be a difficult task requiring lots of investment over many years to achieve the goal. It will also require improving the city’s educational system because education is the key to making progress and having a viable economic future for residents of the area.

Commissioner Griggs expressed complete agreement with Mr. Wallace’s analysis of what’s wrong and his suggestions for how to proceed. A holistic strategic plan will be needed before there can be a sufficient level of coordination and buy-in from all of the agencies and organizations already working in the area. Lots of efforts are underway but none of it is coordinated and strategic. He asked Mr. Wallace about Community Benefit Agreements and what benefit they might have. Mr. Wallace said they are popular in Atlanta, Chicago, Washington DC and Philadelphia, typically older, mature cities. CBAs are only as good as they are enforced by local governments to be sure they are carried out.

The public and private sectors have to be in agreement and committed to making redevelopment work. He believes in investment strategies, not strategic plans, because the funding is the key to making anything work. Change is never easy, and this task won’t be easy. Bold thinking is needed but also long-term (generational) commitment and sufficient funding.

Subcommittee Discussion

Chairwoman Knight asked the committee to review the handouts and be prepared to start crafting a recommendation at next week’s meeting. Commissioner Mills noted that she will be out of town next week and unable to attend the meeting.

**Meeting adjourned:** 11:04 a.m.

Public Comment (following official meeting adjournment)

John Nooney advocated for access to the City’s waterways and requested that the CRC propose a charter amendment requiring the DIA and CRAs to mandate public access to waterways with any publicly funded project. He commented on the lack of parking available for water access sites and lamented the City’s policy of issuing parking tickets at the parking lot adjacent to Sidney Geffen Park, which has a poorly designed kayak launch.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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