

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

**URBAN SERVICES DISTRCT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - amended**

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

**January 30, 2020**

**1:30 p.m.**

**In attendance:** Commissioners Ann-Marie Knight (Chair), Charles Griggs, Frank Denton, Celestine Mills (arr. 1:39)

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Jeff Clements and Anthony Baltiero – Council Research Division; Jessica Matthews, Juliette Williams and [delete Kendra Meeks] Kendra Mervin – Legislative Services Division

**Meeting Convened**: 1:35 p.m.

Chairwoman Knight distributed a document she compiled of all the committee members’ suggestions for a committee report, which the group discussed at length. Commissioner Denton felt the committee had agreed on two goals for its final report: 1) looking back at the past and how the promises of consolidation were or were not met, and 2) looking forward at how to address and remedy current-day disparities of all kinds (economic, crime, health, infrastructure, schools, sense of community, etc.). He felt that the media announcement for tonight’s committee town hall meeting did not adequately reflect those two goals. He stated that the problems that parts of the city and individual families face are profound and widespread and will be extremely complicated to solve.

In response to a question from Chairwoman Knight, Mr. Denton said that he’s talked to a long-time community activist/historian who believes that there was not a specific set of concrete promises made at the time of consolidation. Ms. Knight said she has talked to a respected community member who felt that the African-American history of Jacksonville has been systematically eliminated over the years and perhaps that contributes to the feelings in the community that consolidation has failed them. Commissioner Griggs said that there have been intentional and unintentional acts over the decades that have hurt and disillusioned portions of the community and produced the conditions that now exist. A significant portion of the community has fallen behind because there was too little attention paid and investment made there. Apology for disparities is one thing, but restitution and remedy is another. This committee’s recommendation, if adopted by the full Commission, will be a challenge to the community at large. He has never seen the City make a concerted, sustained effort to remedy the ills of disadvantaged neighborhoods as it has done with downtown revitalization. Equity, not equality, should be the goal. Commissioner Mills agreed that the community at large has not paid much attention to the impoverished parts of urban core since consolidation. The consolidated government could be a powerful force for good if the community made a commitment and invested. She felt that some of the leaders in the area have put personal interest above the community and that has hurt progress. The lack of attention to the urban core by the city at large is extremely discouraging. She said that public safety is fundamental to stabilizing the community.

Commissioner Griggs suggested the name Urban Core Investment Authority for the body being proposed and recommended the boundaries as Health Zone 1 (Zip codes 32202, 32204, 32206, 32208. 32209 and 32254). He would model its structure and staffing after the Downtown Investment Authority and emphasized that independence is an important facet. He recommended three potential funding sources: 1) community benefit agreements; 2) establishment of a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA); and 3) a millage rate adjustment to reflect actual service provision. The adjusted millage rate would be consistent with the original intent of consolidation that different areas of the city would pay differential millage based on the differing level of services being provided. He said that obviously a reliable and sufficient funding source will be the biggest challenge to implementation. The authority should be about developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy that is not just about economic development but encompasses education, health, safety, and other areas as well. Mr. Denton said the authority could tap into state and federal grants and private philanthropy in targeted sectors. He and Mr. Griggs agreed that coordination of both existing and new efforts and programs is necessary to have the maximum impact.

Commissioner Denton suggested the name Urban Core Development Authority to emphasize “development” and not “investment”, which to some is a code word for “more taxes” and would therefore tend to be unpopular. He agrees with Health Zone 1 as the target area, although there are other parts of town that are equally distressed and could qualify as well. He likes the DIA model for its breadth of programming under the general heading of downtown development. Community involvement will be crucial to marshalling attention and buy-in as has happened for downtown.

Commissioner Knight suggested the name Urban Services Investment Authority and agreed with the definition of boundaries as Health Zone 1, at least to start, possibly expanding from there. The USIA could be the single entity that coordinates and focuses all of the disparate activities already going on. Consideration should be given to trying to get existing agencies to focus more on how their activities and programs could impact on the USIA area. In response to a question from Ms. Knight, Jeff Clements describe how the City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) works – how projects are prioritized and how funds are allocated. Commissioner Griggs cautioned that mandating a specific percentage of the CIP be set aside for remedying unfulfilled promises of consolidation might lead to a situation where the City only allocated that minimum amount, regardless of the degree of need. He felt that the district would need both CIP allocations for capital projects and operating support for non-capital purposes. Ms. Knight suggested that the new authority could coordinate with the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Fund board to maximize the efforts of both. She noted that the Blueprint for Improvement II report stated that creation of independent authorities and districts is contrary to the original intent of consolidation and that needs to be taken into account in defending the committee’s proposal. The fact that 55% of the City’s budget is spent on public safety (police and fire services) is a staggering figure and indicates that we spend more on reaction to problems than on proactive prevention.

Commissioner Mills agreed with the comments and suggestions of the previous speakers in most regards. She liked several of the recommendations of the Blueprint for Improvement II report. She felt that a comprehensive and concentrated “Marshall Plan” approach was needed to revitalize the area rather than incremental improvements over many years. She recommended that the committee members read a commentary by former City Council member Bill Bishop about what it would take to revitalize the Northwest Area, a copy of which she submitted electronically with her comments. Improving the city’s educational system should be a top priority because education is so fundamental to people improving their lives. She also agreed that Jacksonville needs to be a proactive rather than reactive city.

Mr. Denton noted that the DIA had been created by an ordinance and not a Charter amendment, but he feels that this new proposed entity does belong in the Charter because it should be a fundamental feature of the city government and not subject to being easily eliminated in the future. Paige Johnston said that it is not unprecedented for independent authorities to be created in the Charter (i.e. the JEA, the Police and Fire Pension Fund), and the CRC could also recommend an Ordinance Code change if they studied an issue and felt it was important to implement, but did not belong in the Charter.

Committee consensus:

Name: Urban Core Development Authority.

Boundaries: initially Health Zone 1 (excluding the territory covered by the Downtown Investment Authority), possibly expanding in the future; the two authorities would consult and coordinate as possible.

Funding: General Fund budget allocation; CIP allocations; Community Benefit Agreements between developers and neighborhood associations (managed by the UCDA); potentially create a Community Redevelopment Area

Timeframe for rollout: aggressively hoping for FY20-21. Commissioner Denton recommended marshaling the support of the Jacksonville Civic Council, the Chamber of Commerce, major media, and others to bring support to bear for its adoption. Once approved by the City Council, a board would need to be created and appointed and an executive director hired to start the strategic planning process and develop a master plan.

Commissioner Denton was delegated the task of crafting the first draft of the committee report for discussion at the next meeting.

Next meeting

The Town Hall Meeting will be tonight at 6:00 p.m. at the Legends Center on Soutel Drive, followed by a regular committee meeting on February 14th at 1:30 p.m.

Commissioner Griggs asked about the plan of action for the town hall meeting tonight. Chairwoman Knight said she anticipated explaining the committee’s two-pronged emphasis (looking at the past and preparing for the future) and asking for public input. The group felt that it was not appropriate to announce the committee’s consensus developed in this meeting to the public lest that stifle discussion, and instead to leave the floor open to the public to comment as they wish.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the committee meeting of December 13, 2019 were **approved as distributed**.

Public Comment

John Nooney said that ethics was put into the Charter after the last Charter Revision Commission, but has been gutted since. He requested that the CRC recommend a Charter amendment requiring the DIA and CRAs (and a new UCDA, if created) to guarantee public access to waterways in all projects supported by public funding. He cited Ordinances 2014-412 (funding for purchase of replacement water taxis), 2013-384 (leasing the City Armory to the Sons of Confederate Veterans), and 2017-1-E (trespass in public parks) as legislation that did not protect public access to waterways. He said the committee needs to invite subject matter experts to opine on how citizen access to waterways can be protected.

**Meeting adjourned:** 3:27 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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