

Feb. 20, 2020

To the Urban Services District Subcommittee:

Here is the updated draft of our report to the full commission. I think I have made the changes we agreed on, but please read it carefully to be sure.

Because of her concerns Tuesday night, I took special care to review Commissioner Mills' submissions to the "consolidated input."

I had already included the data she sent on the stark contrast between the 10 "worst" neighborhoods and the 10 "best." That will be presented in the charts being prepared separately.

She emphasized economic development as a goal of the UCDA. That's a good point, and I've tried to make that clear at a couple of places in the draft.

At the previous meeting, Commissioner Mills suggested that the recommendation should have a more impassioned call for action, and I have tried to honor that, especially at the end, while maintaining the propriety of the commission's report to City Council.

She referenced a 2014 Folio article by Bill Bishop, which essentially endorsed our idea of the UCDA. The article suggested several specific programs that are the sort of projects that might well emerge from the UCDA. I didn't think including the text of the article would be appropriate for our report. Others have written many other opinion pieces suggesting variations of the same point.

The only other contribution from Commissioner Mills to the "consolidated input" was this:

Addressing the disparities that exist in the Urban Core is way beyond the scope of anything that the Urban Services Investment Authority can ameliorate or begin to resolve. Northwest Jacksonville and the Urban Core needs a local Marshall Plan to address sometimes benign and at other times willful neglect that pre-dates the Consolidation of city and county governments in Jacksonville, Florida.

The City Council is the catalyst for economic development in the City of Jacksonville. One of the top city council priorities is to encourage and spur economic development throughout the City of Jacksonville; residents of the neglected communities have patiently watched the city of Jacksonville grow in leaps and bounds in the midst of broken promises.

The Urban Services Investment Authority nor the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Fund can properly address the economic ills that plague the beleaguered Urban Core. Any recommendations we make to the City Council, if approved, would be sterile, ineffective exercises.

Conclusion

After trying my best to formulate ideas within the framework of the parameters set by the Charter Revision Committee, it would be hypocritical to make suggestions and recommendations that offer programs and projects that pacify rather than empower. You have heard it before, "the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over while expecting different results." Real change, meaningful change will take place once we start to address problems rather than symptoms.

While we individually may believe a local Marshall Plan is called for, we as a subcommittee didn't discuss that, and using that term might undermine our recommendation. In fact, the work of the UCDA could rise to that level of commitment.

The rest of that section of Commissioner Mills' input seems to oppose our draft recommendation to create the UCDA.

I will vote to approve the recommendation. However, you know that I have a conflict with tomorrow's meeting. I will be in the Safety and Crime Reduction Commission meeting in the Council Chambers beginning at 9 a.m. If that meeting ends in time, I will join the subcommittee in progress.

Otherwise, if you need my vote for the subcommittee recommendation, I ask that someone summon me from the Council Chambers or text me (904-832-5655), and I will leave that meeting and come vote.

And of course, I will make any further revisions to the recommendation document that the subcommittee desires.

Frank Denton