

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION**

**Meeting Minutes**

**May 5, 2021**

**9:00 a.m.**

**Location:** Lynwood Roberts Room, 1st floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Council Members Tommy Hazouri (President), Aaron Bowman, Michael Boylan, Matt Carlucci, Kevin Carrico, Randy DeFoor (arr. 9:50), Al Ferraro, Terrance Freeman, Reggie Gaffney, Joyce Morgan (via Zoom, arr. 10:10), Sam Newby, Ju’Coby Pittman, Ron Salem (via Zoom), Randy White

**Excused**: Council Members LeAnna Cumber, Danny Becton, Brenda Priestly Jackson, Garrett Dennis, Rory Diamond

**Also**: Kim Taylor and Brian Parks – Council Auditor’s Office; Jeff Clements and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research Division; Cheryl Brown – Council Director/Secretary; Melanie Wilkes, Eric Gratham and Steve Cassada – Information Support Services; Peggy Sidman Martin and Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Stephanie Burch – Mayor’s Office; Paul Soares – Duval County Public Schools; Dr. Steve Wallace - facilitator

**Meeting Convened**: 9:11 a.m.

President Hazouri convened the meeting and introduced the program, noting that the priorities should be one-time projects, not continuing funding commitments. Finding matching funds will increase the amount of work that can be done.

Council Member Carrico gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The attendees introduced themselves for the record. Council Member Carlucci introduced Dr. Steve Wallace, former President of Florida State College at Jacksonville, to moderate the session.

Dr. Wallace said he is very excited about Jacksonville’s future, and that requires outstanding leadership by the Council, among many others, to achieve. He reviewed the Plan to Plan document outlining the process for today’s workshop. Success will be measured by every council member feeling that they had their full say and could fully advocate for all of their issues during the process today. The most important assumption is that all ideas are good and valuable and worthy of discussion. The aim is to achieve a list of 15 great ideas at the end of the day, organized into 3 time ranges for accomplishment – one year, three year and five year initiatives. Consensus is desired, which does not mean absolute unanimity. The initiatives should inform budgetary decisions in order to be effective. Continuity with the past two strategic planning processes is desirable.

Dr. Wallace opened the floor to new initiatives in addition to those proposed in the prior two plans. Council Member Pittman asked if there is any information about what happened to the initiatives previously suggested – how much funding did they receive, have they been completed or is there more work to be done, etc.? Stephanie Burch, Chief Operating Officer, said the Mayor’s Office will compile a report on the status of all of the previous strategic plan initiatives and provide it to the Council.

Council Member Bowman proposed “downtown abandoned buildings” as a new initiative (complete inventory of all buildings downtown, their condition, City properties that could be auctioned off for re-use, etc.) as a stand-alone item separate from the previously listed “downtown activation” item.

Council Member Boylan proposed “City Council’s role in bridging the relationship between the community and the Sheriff’s Office, including community policing” as an item.

Council Member Ferraro reported that funding from some of last year’s initiatives (i.e. additional funding for Crime Stoppers, funding for waterways issues) was spent. He expressed concern that promises already made may not be kept in the process of adding new initiatives that will divert money from what was prioritized last time. Dr. Wallace said continuity of initiatives is important, and that’s where Council’s voting with its “power dots” will determine what needs to be continued.

Council Member Gaffney agreed with Mr. Bowman’ s suggestion for revitalizing downtown, particularly getting abandoned buildings rehabbed or demolished to remove eyesores from the skyline. He also agreed that continued funding for previously ranked projects should be considered before adding new initiatives. He noted that there is $4 million set aside for “building a swimming pool at First Coast High School” on the Northside and suggested that as an item. President Hazouri said the School Board will match City funding for pool construction on school properties and suggested that “Atlantic Coast High School pool” also be an item. He recommended adding that as an item with Mr. Gaffney’s pool suggestion. He noted that the intention of these strategic plan initiatives is for one-time projects, not continuing funding commitments.

Dr. Wallace said his instruction for facilitating the process was to ignore funding and concentrate on the ideas and priorities. Determining funding amounts and sources will happen later.

Council Member Carlucci proposed “funding $1 million for construction of the first mile of the Emerald Trail (LaVilla Link)” as an item, as well as “$500,000 for a community-inclusive planning process for downtown waterfront parks and public access, in conjunction with the work being done by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund”. Council Member Ferraro recommended expanding the waterways access item to be citywide, not just restricted to downtown.

Council Member Pittman proposed “neighborhood small business corridor reinvestment initiative” as an item (i.e. a better/expanded façade improvement program for small businesses) as an item. Dr. Wallace said the “power dot” voting process later in the day will determine whether council members feel that a previous initiative is completed or not.

Council Member DeFoor proposed “annual renewal of at least 1 park or community center per district” as an item.

Council Member Bowman said a decision will need to be made at some point about when short-term initiatives become permanently funded ongoing programs. Some items become permanent functions of government and should no longer be considered “new” initiatives.

Council Member Freeman proposed “fund the next phase of the Jacksonville Journey program of prevention, intervention and reentry and expand the area from Health Zone 1 to the entire city” as an item.

Council Member Carrico proposed “creation of an information clearinghouse for school options (public schools, charter schools, private schools, parental choice, scholarship options, etc.) as an item.

Council Member Newby proposed “continuation of the food desert feeding initiatives” as a continuation item.

Dr. Wallace reviewed the wording of the proposed new initiatives to ensure they reflected the intent of the proposers.

**The meeting was in recess from 10:30 to 10:46 a.m.**

Several more new initiatives were proposed during the recess:

* Social justice spending oversight and accountability mechanism (CM Freeman)
* Primary health care for the working poor/uninsured (CM Salem)
* Funding for enhanced waterfront access and waterfront facilities maintenance citywide (CM Ferraro)
* Additional funding for Crime Stoppers (CM Ferraro)

The council members who proposed new initiatives each had the opportunity to further explain and advocate for their proposals. Stephanie Burch explained the design and funding process for the LaVilla Model Mile of the Emerald Trail, which is a joint venture between the City and Groundworks Jax. The bids for construction of the first segment came in well over the projected cost so alternatives are being considered for finding additional funding or for value engineering some scope reductions to reduce the cost.

**The meeting was in recess from 11:50 to 12:10.**

Dr. Wallace suggested the need to clarify an item from a previous strategic plan entitled “fund second phase of the Jacksonville Journey” since the Journey no longer exists, its functions having been distributed among several agencies, including the Kids Hope Alliance. How does the Council want to deal with a priority regarding an entity that no longer exists, but whose functions may still be relevant and desired? Council Auditor Kim Taylor noted the difficulty the City has experienced in following the KHA program participants via longitudinal studies to determine the effectiveness of KHA program funding. Stephanie Burch said that KHA has a public dashboard that provides information on the agency’s spending and programs. KHA CEO Mike Weinstein is in the process of hiring a consultant to review and evaluate all of the KHA’s programs and data to help evaluate what programs have been more and less effective.

Dr. Wallace said that continuity of the initiatives adopted in the previous two strategic planning processes is equally as important as considering the proposed new initiatives, and invited members to advocate for prioritizing continuation of those initiatives.

Council Member Bowman advocated for continuing efforts to combat homelessness, a problem that has not been solved. He also said the A-STEP employment assistance program has been extremely successful and advocated for its continuation and expansion. The community cleanliness initiative never seemed to generate any action and still needs to be addressed. Infant mortality is still a tremendous problem in Jacksonville and nationally and deserves more funding.

Dr. Wallace congratulated the council members on a great exchange of ideas and proposals of very worthy projects for consideration. The next step is to prioritize the many potential initiatives in terms of time frame (one, three and five years) and urgency by means of allocating colored dots to vote on priorities. The council members distributed red, green and blue dots among the various proposals to indicate their priorities. Proposals with no dots were immediately eliminated from further consideration, as were those with only two or three dots. The members then distributed one more set of pink “power dots” to vote for their highest priorities. The results appeared fairly decisive:

Initiative proposal (total votes/number of power dots)

* Accelerate reduction of food desert areas (29/9)
* Construct swimming pools at First Coast and Atlantic Coast High Schools (19/1)
* Annual renewal of 1 park or community center in each council district (14/6)
* Improved access to waterways citywide (11/4)
* Fund construction of the Model Mile of the Emerald Trail (10/4)
* Social justice accountability (9/1)
* Improve community relationship with Sheriff’s Office (8/3)
* Improve downtown vitality (8/1)
* Evaluate mental health care and access (7/1)
* Primary health care for the working poor (6/2)
* Goodwill A-STEP program (6/1)
* Reduce infant mortality (6/1)

Mr. Wallace will tabulate all the votes, prepare a ranking of the proposals in the one-, three- and five-year categories, and provide that ranking to the Council.

**Meeting adjourned:** 1:39 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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