**Taxation, Revenue, and Utilization**

**of Expenditures (TRUE) Commission**

**Daniel Henry, Chair**

**TRUE COMMISSION HYBRID IN-PERSON/VIRTUAL MEETING**

**Preliminary Meeting Minutes**

*The minutes of this meeting are preliminary until reviewed and*

*approved by the TRUE Commission at a future meeting.*

**May 6, 2021**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Lynwood Roberts Room and virtually via Zoom platform**

**Attendance:** Commissioners Keshan Chambliss (Vice Chair, via Zoom), John Roberts, Mark Merritt, Bruce Tyson, Ramon Day, Velma Rounsville, Daniel Henry (arr. 4:55)

**Excused:** None

**Absent**: None

**Also**: Jeff Clements and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research; Eric Grantham – Council Support Services; Tommy Carter – Council Auditor’s Office

The meeting was convened at 4:09 p.m. and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Approval of minutes

The minutes of the April 1, 2021 Commission member-to-member virtual meetings were **approved as distributed without objection**.

Public Comment

John Nooney said he was attending his first TRUE Commission meeting and wanted to convey that public trust in City government has been crushed. He recently attended an Ethics Commission meeting in hopes of getting public comment restored to meetings to give the public more opportunity for input. Examples of bills that didn’t have sufficient public participation: 2021-75 FIND projects list; 2020-559 Vessel registration fee; 2021-205 FIND grant funds re-appropriation. Public participation should not be at the discretion of the chair of the meeting, which was a bad ruling by General Counsel Jason Gabriel. Carla Miller, City Ethics Director, told him to go to the State Attorney or the Attorney General to seek enforcement of Ordinance 2017-160 (public participation in meetings). Commissioner Merritt suggested that emailing City Council members is a good way to reach all of them. Mr. Nooney said that emails are easily ignored, so that is what drives him to attend meetings in person so that he is a visible presence and knows that they hear his voice.

Auditor’s Report

Tommy Carter of the Auditor’s Office reported that his office had released 4 reports since the last TRUE Commission meeting:

#843 Sheriff’s Office Investigative Fund FY16/17

#844 Sheriff’s Office Investigative Fund FY17/18

#845 License Fees for Adult Bookstores

#846 Kids Hope Alliance Grant Audit

These four audits will be discussed in detail at the next Audit Committee meeting. Commissioner Merritt, Chair of the Audit Committee, asked that #808A – Communication Tower Audit Follow-Up also be discussed at the next Audit Committee meeting since it hasn’t been reviewed yet by the committee.

Committee Reports

Audit Committee: Commissioner Merritt said the committee met did not meet last month but will meet on May 27th at 3 p.m. instead of the originally scheduled date of May 20th.

Legislative Tracking Committee: Commissioner Roberts distributed a report showing the distribution of types of City Council legislation introduced in the last few months. The predominant type of legislation is zoning and land use change ordinances (21.9%), followed by appointment resolutions (16.7%) and “honoring and commending” resolutions (10.4%).

He noted several bills of interest currently pending before the City Council:

2021-210: appropriation of $1.1M to Region’s Bank in the form of a $200,000 grant and $900,000 in forgivable loans to incentivize historic rehabilitation of its offices on Bay Street and to reimburse the bank for certain expenses involved in the sale of its parking lot to VyStar Credit Union for construction of a parking garage that will have some spaces reserved for public use. Mr. Roberts noted that the ordinance does not contain the usual economic development parameters or measures – job creation, capital investment, etc. He doesn’t like incentives being offered for non-traditional purposes.

2021-223: extending the existing local option gas tax for additional years and adding an additional local option gas tax for transportation projects. Mr. Roberts noted that a large portion of the funding is allocated to the JTA for its Ultimate Urban Circulator (U2C) project to retrofit and expand the Skyway, which has been a failure throughout its life. Peoplemover systems only really work in places like airports for point-to-point transportation of large numbers of people between a few specific destinations. Jacksonville’s downtown doesn’t have a focal point to concentrate riders so there’s really no need for the Skyway or its successor.

2021-235: $100M for septic tank remediation projects over the next 2 years. Mr. Roberts noted the current $51,000 per lot average cost of recent septic tank remediation projects, so simple math says it will be a $1.2B job to remove just the 23,000+ identified environmentally hazardous septic tanks in the county. He thinks annual City inspections of septic tanks financed by a user fee or assessment is warranted to ensure the tanks are properly maintained and prevent them from being an environmental problem. Commissioner Merritt said that hundreds of septic tanks are still being installed in the city every year, so the problem is not going to get better any time soon.

Chair’s Comments

None

Old Business

Comparable city crime and police research: Commissioner Merritt distributed and discussed his database of information on the comparable cities he’s studied. He did not include crime data other than murders because he felt that was not relevant to the original purpose of the TRUE project. He has included per capita measurements for several statistics. He’s also refined his numbers for Baton Rouge, which is a consolidated city/county government like Jacksonville, but not entirely comparable in structure.

City and county financial comparisons: Commissioner Roberts discussed his research on consolidated city/county governments and their finances, population characteristics, and crime statistics. Comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) data is a primary source for the financial statistics. There is a tremendous amount of data available on city and county finances – the trick is to boil it down to a usable amount and format. There are judgement calls that have to be made because of the different ways that governments categorize their expenditures and organize their functions and employees. The data can be used to answer many different questions. The 2019 fiscal year is the baseline. Commissioner Day noted that cities may have different fiscal years. Commissioner Merritt pointed out that the lists of cities don’t match exactly on the two handouts. Jeff Clements noted that CAFRdata.com is a subscription service that apparently collects publicly available local and state CAFRs, compiles them into a database, and makes them available through a subscription service for research purposes. Commissioner Roberts asked the commissioners to look over and comment on his handouts and suggest where there are holes or additional information that ought to be added. Suggestions can be sent to Mr. Clements and he will pass them on to Mr. Roberts.

New Business

Commissioner Chambliss asked when the commission envisioned bringing representatives of the Sheriff’s Office in for a discussion now that a lot of research has been done on crime data. Commissioner Merritt suggested developing a list of questions in advance for JSO to answer at the meeting rather than just letting them make a presentation of what they want to discuss. Commissioner Rounsville agreed that would be a useful mechanism. Ms. Chambliss suggested compiling the question list at the June meeting. Mr. Merritt suggested that every commissioner submit 2 or 3 questions to staff in the next week or two for discussion at the June meeting and distillation into the final list for transmittal.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Merritt remarked on the handout distributed today containing an excerpt from the Finance Committee’s meeting earlier this week that included a discussion by the Council Auditor about the Kids Hope Alliance Audit in which Council Member Salem commented on the City’s contract management processes. Mr. Merritt said that the new 1Cloud financial management is not the answer to poor contract management. If staff doesn’t know how to manage a grant, the financial system is not going to save the day. The City needs competent employees who know how to do the job. Commissioner Henry wondered what the City does to ensure that employees have the knowledge they need to be successful, since you don’t want to set people up to fail. Mr. Merritt said that presumably it does what all organizations do - hire the best people they can find and manage them to do the job that needs to be done. Commissioner

Tyson said the City has the same problem with contract management that it apparently has with grant management - long-standing problems that don’t get solved. It seems to him like a failure of management to ensure that employees are properly trained to do the job and monitored to be sure it’s getting done.

Commissioner Henry asked if any response has been received to the reminder sent out about the JSO accident project data requests. Mr. Clements reported that Chief Financial Officer Joey Greive has been reminded and said he would check on progress, but no response has been received yet.

Next meetings

Audit Committee – May 27th, 3:00 p.m.

Full commission – June 3rd at 4:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

Jeff Clements, City Council Research Division

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Posted 5.14.21 10:00 a.m.