**Taxation, Revenue, and Utilization**

**of Expenditures (TRUE) Commission**

**Daniel Henry, Chair**

**TRUE COMMISSION**

**Meeting Minutes**

**December 2, 2021**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Don Davis Room**

**1st floor, City Hall**

**Attendance:** Commissioners Daniel Henry (Chair), Dr. Keshan Chambliss, John Roberts, Bruce Tyson, Ramon Day, Velma Rounsville

**Excused:** None

**Absent**: None

**Also**: Jeff Clements – City Council Research; Tommy Carter – Council Auditor’s Office; Kenneth Darity – Kids Hope Alliance

The meeting was convened at 4:00 p.m. by Chairman Henry and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Approval of minutes

The minutes of the October 7, 2021 Commission meeting were **approved unanimously as distributed**.

Appearance by Kenneth Darity - Kids Hope Alliance Chief Programs Officer

Mr. Darity gave an overview of the programming and funding of the Kids Hope Alliance. Essential service programming areas include: early learning; juvenile justice; out-of-school time; pre-teen and teen; and special needs. The KHA serves tens of thousands of youth annually and allocates approximately $35 million to direct programming. Approximately half of the funding is allocated to out-of-school-time programming (afternoons, weekends, summer time) where there is a particularly strong return on investment. The agency generates a substantial amount of state grant funds to match local resources. A focus of the programming for teens and pre-teens is college and job readiness, career exploration, internships, etc.

Commissioner Chambliss asked for clarification of the extent of the full-service schools; Mr. Darity described the hub and feeder school system. In response to another question, he explained the services provided under the special services category, which are currently provided at two schools in the county. Commissioner Roberts asked for a description of KHA’s job training and career readiness programs. In response to another question, Mr. Darity explained that KHA does not provide services directly, instead using an array of not-for-profit agencies to deliver programming. KHA’s functions include contract, program and grant management, marketing and public information, and program assessment and data management. In response to a question from Commissioner Day, Mr. Darity said KHA’s total budget is about $42-$45 million, with $35 million going to direct programming and $7 - $10 million to overhead and administration. In response to a question from Commissioner Rounsville, Mr. Darity said that the Teen Court program is handled by the Fourth Judicial Circuit Courts, not directly by KHA. He noted that KHA programs are targeted at youth aged 18 and under, except for the special services category which serves older persons if they are still in the Duval County School system.

In response to a question from Chairman Henry, Mr. Darity described the job readiness and employment skills training provided by Goodwill Industries, the main contractor for those services which is in its first contract year. He noted that transportation is a major issue with students being able to access available opportunities. KHA may work with JTA on exploring potential alternatives to students using the traditional bus routes. In response to another question, Mr. Darity discussed KHA’s processes for publicizing its programs and recruiting participants, which rely to a great extent on social media since walk-up traffic to the office has been dramatically affected by the COVID pandemic. Chairman Henry asked about any evaluation that has been done on the relative effectiveness of direct service provision versus the contracting model, and on the KHA’s effectiveness compared with other similar organizations in other cities. Mr. Darity said that KHA does have the authority to provide services directly if there are no local service providers in a particular field. He also described the relationship between the KHA and Duval County Public Schools, which is very cooperative.

Public Comment

None

Council Auditor’s Report

Tommy Carter of the Auditor’s Office reported that the office has released 3 reports since the last commission meeting:

#852 – Budget Summary for FY21-22 (<https://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/council-auditor/852-budget-summary-fiscal-year-21-22.aspx>): the Auditor’s Office’s review of the proposed budget identified $2,081,669 in additional revenue and $1,310,799 in expenditure reductions for total positive impact of 3,392,468. The office also made a recommendation resulting in $4,794,902 in avoided borrowing. The Finance Committee identified $1,739,969 in net savings at the end of its review process, of which $440,294 was allocated a Council President’s Contingency Fund for future designation.

#853 – Council Auditor’s Office Annual Report for FY20-21 (<https://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/council-auditor/853-council-auditor-annual-report-fy20-21.aspx>): the Auditor’s Office is made of up three branches – the legislative team, the audit team, and the special projects team. The audit team produced 5 performance audits, 3 attestations, and 16 follow-up reports on previous audits. The legislative team reviewed 533 bills pending before the council and identified over $700,000 in savings. The special projects team issued 7 special reports and conducted numerous other projects and research. The Auditor’s staff assists the City Finance Department and the JEA with their independent audits by contributing staff time, and devoted considerable time and effort to the Lot J and Shipyard proposed development projects during the year.

#751B – Follow-Up on Fire and Rescue Department – Ambulance Billing and Inventory Audit (<https://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/council-auditor/751b-follow-up-on-fire-and-rescue-department-amb.aspx>): 16 issues were identified in the original audit; 11 were cleared by the last follow-up; 3 were cleared with this follow-up; 2 issues remain. Surprise inventory counts were held at the Logistical Support Facility and Tactical Support Facility since the last follow-up, but were not conducted in accordance with the office’s policy on audits. The Fire and Rescue Department agreed with the findings and an additional follow-up will be performed to determine the compliance.

Mr. Carter addressed an issue raised at the last meeting about the vetting of agencies that got COVID funding at the direction of individual City Council members. Recipients must comply with American Rescue Plan record-keeping requirements as sub-grant recipients. The City (Finance Department and Council Auditor’s Office) have audit rights on the recipients’ expenditure records. Mr. Carter was unaware if the Auditor’s Office planned to do any spot-checks on those recipients.

Audit Committee Report

None

Legislative Tracking Committee:

Commissioner Roberts reported on several pending ordinances of interest:

2021-818: the bill requests a postponement (in addition to the 2 postponements already granted) of the completion date and retail sales commencement date for the White Farms food desert project for an agency (Clara White Mission) that’s been in the news lately for criticism by its former board members.

2021-854: economic development incentives for Cenntro Automotive to build electric vehicle production facility in the city. Mr. Roberts investigated the company’s history and finds that it is a Chinese company operated through a holding company that has had numerous headquarters over the course of recent years. The company seems to be a vehicle for acquiring technology and doesn’t seem to have produced any vehicles anywhere. The background of the company and its activities seems very puzzling – a pending merger between this vehicle company and a swimwear and lingerie company has been reported in the business media.

Chair’s Comments

Chairman Henry reported that as TRUE Commission Chair he has met several times in the last month as a member of the Inspector General Selection and Retention Committee to discuss complaints made against the City’s Inspector General, Lisa Green, by several employees in her office. The complaints are confidential until the Office of General Counsel’s investigation is complete but will be revealed thereafter. Ms. Green has been placed on administrative leave until the matter is resolved. The committee voted to compel her to testify before the committee as provided in her employment contract. He said there are 4 factors for which an IG can be removed from office: neglect of duty, abuse of power or authority, discrimination, or ethical misconduct. She will have an opportunity to make her case before the committee which will make a termination decision that would then go to the City Council for a final ruling. An interim IG has been appointed who is very well respected nationally and who helped to set up the IG’s office 10 years ago. The committee did not want anyone with Jacksonville ties to hold the interim position. Appointing a new IG would require both IG Committee and City Council approval. The IG Committee gave Ms. Green a good evaluation and a raise before all this started, so they see the need to delve more deeply into the IG’s operations in the future. This situation has highlighted the need for a clearly defined line of succession, which does not currently exist.

Old Business

Commissioner Roberts distributed his Peer City Comparison report and asked the members to read it and pose questions at the next meeting.

New Business

Commissioner Day distributed and discussed a white paper entitled “Staffing the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office: An Assessment of the Future.” His analysis finds that, due to its consolidated nature, the City of Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office is more comparable to a big city police department than a traditional county sheriff’s office and, by that standard, the City is understaffed by 369 sworn officers in the combined Patrol and Enforcement Division and Investigations and Homeland Security Division. He advocated for increasing the employee cap and increasing hiring to reach a generally accepted standard of 2.36 officers per 1,000 population over the course of the next 5 fiscal years. To reach that goal and deal with the normal growth rate of the employee count due to growth in the City’s population would require hiring 235 new officers in addition to the 369 shortfall, also recognizing that 40-50 officers retire each year and those positions need to be filled annually as well.

Mr. Day proposed that the commission read and study his report and be prepared for extensive discussion at the January meeting and a vote at the February meeting on the proposal. That timing would work well with the budget preparation process for FY22-23, which begins in the early spring of next year.

Commissioner Roberts suggested the need to compare Jacksonville’s crime rate with other comparable cities and to do a cost/benefit analysis of the true net benefit of expending the additional funds for these new positions.

Chairman Henry posed four questions to be answered before a final decision can be made:

1. How will the new positions be distributed in the department?
2. How many other police departments in Florida meet the 2.36 standard?
3. Are there other revenue streams aside from ad valorem growth that could be used to fill these positions?
4. Will there be a benefit in reducing JSO overtime as the employee count grows?

Mr. Day said his proposal recommends the new positions be placed just in the Patrol and Enforcement and Investigations and Homeland Security divisions; new hiring in other areas is a separate issue. He also said he believes that public safety is a core function of local government and, in his opinion, should be funded with a core revenue. Commissioner Chambliss said improved/increased training is needed to improve JSO’s operations. Mr. Day agreed more training is needed, but said JSO can’t do it now because of the heavy workload of trying to answer the calls, which takes up all of the officers’ available time. Mr. Tyson said that if hiring more officers cuts down on crime, then there could be a savings in the Corrections Division budget due to fewer inmates. Dr. Chambliss said she thinks more citizen oversight is needed of JSO, with a citizen review board or some other similar mechanism. Mr. Day said such a body could perform a review after the confidential part of the department’s investigation of officer conduct is completed and could opine on departmental training and policies. Mr. Henry said that JSO should be held to the same standard of accountability as any other department and should not get a blank check to increase its budget without some form of oversight using objective metrics. Mr. Day said the ultimate control lies with the City Council. Mr. Roberts said unions will always advocate for more staffing. Mr. Henry said crime prevention is also an important factor in bringing down the overall crime rate.

Commissioner Comments

None

Next meetings

Audit Committee – at the call of the Chair as needed when new audits/reports are released

Legislative Tracking Committee – at the call of the Chair as needed

Full commission – January 6, 2022

The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p.m.

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