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RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**JACKSONVILLE SMALL AND EMERGING BUSINESSES (“JSEB”) SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

**Meeting Minutes**

**March 6, 2024, 10:30 a.m.**

**Location:** Council Chambers, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Chairman Raul Arias; Council Member Ken Amaro; Council Member Mike Gay

**Also:** Council Member Joe Carlucci; Trista Carraher, Council Auditor’s Office; Shannon MacGillis, Office of the General Counsel; Eamon Webb, Research Division; Gregory Grant, JSEB Administrator

**Meeting Convened:** 10:30 a.m.

Chairman Raul Arias called the meeting to order. He stated that there is about \$229,000 in available funding that JSEB administration could use to fund its technological and marketing projects. However, JSEB administration had voiced that these projects would cost an estimated \$500,000. Gregory Grant, JSEB Administrator, stated that additional staffing would cost \$100,000; technological projects would cost \$250,000; and marketing projects would cost \$100,000. CM Arias noted that the deficit between available funds and the JSEB administration’s request was approximately \$221,000.

CM Arias asked Mr. Grant about the costs regarding the new staff. Mr. Grant stated that JSEB administration would add one new full-time position, which should cost around \$60,000. They would also move the part-time administrative assistant to a full-time salaried position, with the new salary being

around \$50,000. The three Compliance Officers would also receive salary increases due to increased workloads and time commitments for the new technology and marketing projects. CM Arias asked how large these raises would be, and Mr. Grant stated that they would be around 5%. Between the \$60,000 salary for the new hire, the increase in salary from the part-time employee moving to full-time, and raises for Compliance Officers, new staffing costs should equal around \$100,000.

CM Arias asked whether this injection of funds would be a one-time payment or recurring, and Mr. Grant clarified that it would be a one-time payment. Mr. Grant stated that it would likely receive any future funding through the appropriation to the Office of Economic Development through the budget.

CM Arias noted conversations at the previous Special Committee meeting in which Mr. Grant emphasized that technological projects would precede marketing projects. CM Arias asked Mr. Grant about the status of technological projects, and Mr. Grant stated that JSEB administration had received a quote from B2Gnow, a company that specializes in designing software for the public and private sectors, of \$60,000 for the website/application improvements. He stated that this company had worked successfully with local governments elsewhere in Florida. CM Arias asked who was responsible for maintaining the current website, and Mr. Grant stated that the current website is run by the City but that he believes there would be capacity issues on the City's server once the application process is digitized. Mr. Grant also clarified that this was only a quote from B2Gnow; they would likely be one of the leading candidates for the work, but JSEB administration would still need to go through the RFP process to select a private contractor for this work.

CM Gay asked whether there were any JSEBs who could work on the JSEB website, and Mr. Grant stated that there were several JSEBs who were experts in website build and that these JSEBs could be brought in to work on independent parts of the site. CM Gay agreed with the assessment that the JSEB website would benefit from a private contractor working on the site rather than relying on City resources.

CM Amaro asked what the cost would be for contracting with B2Gnow; Mr. Grant stated that the quote that JSEB administration had received showed an estimated cost between \$60,000 and \$80,000. He stated that the website would require complex design, as there would be a separate application process for each "tier" of JSEB. This cost would be for the initial update of the website and recurring maintenance costs would be significantly lower. CM Amaro asked whether this figure included smaller contracts with JSEBs, and Mr. Grant stated that it did not. These "microcontracts" typically cost around \$5,000 to \$6,000, and Mr. Grant stated that 3 to 4 JSEBs would be included. CM Arias stated that JSEB administration could reach out to JSEBs first for opportunities to work on the website and piecemeal as much work as possible by JSEBs.

CM Arias noted that JSEB administration had budgeted \$300,000 to professional services, which would have included website maintenance costs, and asked whether this money could be re-allocated due to JSEB's contracting with a private entity for the website. Mr. Grant stated that he has a meeting set up with ITD to discuss this issue. CM Arias added that he would like to get an update on this topic at the next JSEB Special Committee meeting, as he would like to be smart with the existing funds that are available to JSEB administration.

CM Amaro asked whether Mr. Grant could provide a timeline of when JSEB administration would be able to provide a tangible update regarding the website. Mr. Grant stated that he would have an update by the end of the month; an idea draft had already been completed, and he could provide a rough sketch of how the next few fiscal years would look for the project to the Special Committee at a future meeting. CM Arias asked whether a staff member of JSEB administration would be overseeing the private contractor tasked with updating the website, and Mr. Grant stated that there would be a staff member charged with overseeing the project. CM Arias stated he was interested in seeing how much money would be saved from the money that had been budgeted for professional services by contracting this work out to a private entity. Mr. Grant stated that his team had already initiated the RFI process and that the next step, the RFP process, would begin soon.

CM Joe Carlucci, visiting Council Member, spoke on bill 2024-0165, which approves an amendment to the Façade Renovation Grant Program so that matching dollars will not be required from JSEBs when they are retained by businesses through the program. CM Carlucci stated that this program would help JSEBs in small businesses to take advantage of this Façade Renovation Grant Program in economically distressed areas. The bill would also increase the maximum funds authorized in Level 1 areas from \$5,000 to \$7,500 and in Level 2 areas from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

CM Carlucci stated that removing the matching grant requirement for businesses contracted through this program for JSEBs would remove the high barrier for entry for their participation in the program. He observed that many JSEBs can do the work outlined by the program but might not be able to raise the matching funds.

CM Amaro noted that he saw this bill as a “win-win” situation for both the Façade Renovation Grant Program and for JSEBs, as the pool of businesses combatting blight in disaffected areas would be increased by this change and JSEB’s opportunity to receive business would increase.

CM Gay asked whether grants offered through the program are forgivable; CM Carlucci stated that the pre-screener would be on the front-end of the process and that any qualifying JSEB would be eligible for the match removal.

CMs Gay, Amaro, and Arias requested to be added as co-sponsors to the bill.

Mr. Grant introduced representatives from JEA, JAA, and JAXPORT to speak on their work with JSEBs.

Mike McCoy, Coordinator of Vendor Management and SEB Programs for JAXPORT, explained the organization’s commitment to working with JSEBs. CM Arias asked how JAXPORT provides value to JSEBs, and Mr. McCoy responded that they are working with the City to provide opportunities for JSEBs to participate in contracts.

Yetunde Oyewole, Small Business Program Coordinator for JAXPORT, explained that she got her start in small business and appreciates the work they do for the community. She stated that JAXPORT makes its best effort to utilize JSEBs in various projects.

Bill Hickey, Manager of the Jacksonville Small Emerging Business Program for JEA, stated that JEA has a commitment to utilize JSEBs for 20% of its contracts, and the total amount of current contracts with JSEBs equals \$26 million. He stated that he communicates with Mr. Grant frequently and that the Council could have discussions about which participation policy would best assist JSEBs in receiving City contracts.

Wendy Khan and Brian Bergen of the Office of Economic Development spoke on the JSEB's transition into OED pursuant to the proposed reorganization of the Executive Branch proposed by bill 2024-0175. Ms. Khan stated that OED had been meeting with Mr. Grant weekly to discuss this transition; some programs and positions will be re-classified upon the completion of the transition, which should result in some cost savings. CM Arias asked whether the new positions discussed previously in the meeting (the Special Projects manager in charge of technology and marketing efforts and the full-time administrative assistant) would be eliminated upon completion of the transition; Ms. Khan stated that current staff will be retained but roles may change. Any additional positions would be requested through the budget process. She stated that OED had a completed white paper that demonstrated the expected fiscal needs of the department.

CM Amaro stated that he believes JSEB's movement into OED will be a good fit and that this transition could improve efficiency and remove redundancy in the Executive Branch.

**Public Comment:**

Eros Marcello, an AI design engineer and Douglas Anderson School of the Arts alumnus who has worked in Silicon Valley, stated that he believes that Jacksonville can become a hub of innovation if it fosters an environment conducive to the recruiting of innovative upstarts. He stated that Jacksonville's existing FinTech infrastructure and proximity to the Space Coast make Jacksonville a prime candidate to overtake Silicon Valley while retaining its unique identity.

Telisa Robinson stated that she is passionate about seeing the City thrive as a minority triple small-business owner. She stated that small businesses need access to capital and to work contracts. She stated that she has attempted to be part of the transformation of the Historic Eastside but has been overlooked for eight months. She affirmed her belief in the power of community and called on the Council to work to provide opportunities for small businesses.

Shawnice Miller, President of Prospective Security Services, stated that there is a problem of larger corporations seeing economic opportunity in Jacksonville and taking business away from local small businesses. She stated that small businesses are often not considered as opposed to larger businesses despite the small businesses' capability of doing the work and willingness to jump through all the hoops necessary to gain work. She observed that JSEB's educational opportunities have been valuable to her

organization, but small businesses are still not considered despite the knowledge they have gained through these programs.

Cheya Thousand stated that Jacksonville's goal of becoming a resilient city begins with small business owners. She stated that it is difficult for small businesses, and thus whole communities, to thrive when mental health resources are not widely available. She stated that she would like to see wellness and emotional and mental health programs targeted to small business owners.

CM Arias thanked all public comments for their knowledge and passion and noted the work that Gregory Grant has done to improve the status of small businesses within the community of late. He stated that the administration is dedicated to bringing contract opportunities to JSEBs and that he would have a conversation with Mr. Grant regarding mental health resources.

CM Arias asked whether moving funds for new positions would require the introduction of legislation; Trista Carraher of the Council Auditor's Office explained that a re-classified position would not require legislation but that an entirely new position would require legislation, which could be introduced by the administration or by the Special Committee.

**Meeting adjourned:** 11:28 a.m.

Minutes: Eamon Webb, Council Research Division

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