



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Minutes

October 23, 2025

3:30 p.m.

Location: Lynwood Roberts Room

In attendance: Chair Freeman, Vice Chair Amaro, Council Members Pittman, White, Carrico (visiting), Peluso (visiting)

Also: John Everett, Kids Hope Alliance (Ex-Officio); Trista Carraher, Council Auditor's Office; Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Counsel; Brandon Russell, Council Research

Meeting Convened: 3:31 p.m.

Meeting Call to Order:

Chair Freeman called the meeting to order.

Introductions and Welcome:

Chair Freeman welcomed the group and called for introductions.

Committee Overview and Vision:

Chair Freeman provided Council President Carrico the opportunity to explain the origin of the special committee. He stated that empowering young people in the community was one of his major priorities. He selected CM Freeman as chair for his knowledge of workforce development and his passion for helping youth.

Chair Freeman began by reading the charge of the special committee, which is to address the following matters: explore initiatives, programs, and partnerships to promote educational advancement, life skills, mentorship, and civic engagement among youth in Jacksonville; make recommendations on recreational programming, accessibility, and uses of parks and community centers, including evaluation of partnerships with non-profit and community organizations; support job training programs, career

pipelines, apprenticeships, and employment readiness initiatives, especially those focused on underserved and at-risk populations; and evaluate public safety concerns in Jacksonville parks, including lighting, infrastructure, and needed security measures, in coordination with Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

He directed the committee's attention to a packet distributed to them to review the committee's purpose. He stated that the committee will examine how Jacksonville can better align education, youth development, and workforce readiness, so every young person has a clear path from high school to meaningful employment. He added that the committee's work will ensure that the City's investments connect early learning, mentorship, job-readiness, and training opportunities under a single, coordinated vision to strengthen the City's workforce and reduce long-term public costs.

Chair Freeman stated that the committee was important because efforts to support the City's youth are often siloed, and he viewed it as a place to bring those organizations together.

John Everett, KHA, stated that one of the most significant gaps he sees is in transitional support needed for young people turning eighteen. He added that organizations do a good job of providing resources for young people from early learning through high school but do so less well once they graduate. He recognized members in the room, like workforce innovation network partners and other providers, who have been working on these issues. He added that the committee was not a KHA- or Council-driven initiative but was based on feedback from youth in the community.

Chair Freeman stated that the City has two primary forms of allocating money for the areas under the focus of this special committee: Public Service Grants and KHA. He continued, adding that each comes with its own set of limitations. KHA has age restrictions that have been increased to 24 through state statute and local ordinance. Public Service Grants begin at age 18, and that is the gap he stated he wanted to address.

He identified the gap as ages 16-24 and stated that about 22,600 people in that age range are neither working nor in school. He noted the gap widens after age 18 when young people lose access to school-based support yet lack entry points to employment or training. He continued, stating that employers report worker shortages in healthcare, construction, logistics, and technology. Despite growth in Jacksonville's economy, between 2019 and 2024, the city saw a 2% loss of residents ages 20-29, signaling a departure for better education and career opportunities elsewhere. He cited data indicating that each disconnected young person costs taxpayers between \$14,000 and \$37,000 in lost earnings, tax revenue, and increased public expenses.

Mr. Everett reviewed the four strategic areas: education and life skills; mentorship and social capital; experiential learning; and safe spaces. He emphasized the need to prepare students not only for current jobs but also for future jobs and industries. He also stressed the need to connect education and training with social connections and mentorship. He stated that much of the data on workforce development suggests that tradesmen are emerging as a new class of millionaires and questioned whether young people are aware of that. He stated that the committee must also consider the spaces young people use to congregate and how these spaces may differ from the past.

Chair Freeman provided a statistical snapshot of young people in Jacksonville, noting that people ages 14 through 24 make up about 13 percent of the City's workforce across sectors such as food service, retail, and transportation. He added that employers identify top skills gaps as adaptability, reliability, communication, and technology proficiency. He continued, stating that the region has 228 registered apprenticeship employers and more than 1700 internship opportunities. He pointed out that in neighborhoods like Brentwood, Norwood, and Royal Terrace, prime-age employment lags the city

average by more than 15 percent. He stated that these communities will serve as focus zones for Youth Empowerment hubs, which will bring together workforce, recreation, and mentorship programs.

He then provided dates for future meetings, each of which will run for an hour. The next will be November 13, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., with subsequent meetings on January 15, February 19, and March 26, 2026. He told those in the audience involved in the committee's work that they will have opportunities to present and share what they bring to the table. He added that the committee will have a budget of about \$5 million to appropriate, and that an RFP process will be established with assistance from KHA.

Discussion:

CM Peluso highlighted the athletic associations in his district with limited funding, resulting in a dearth of youth sports leagues and funding for things like uniforms. Chair Freeman told CM Peluso to have those coaches reach out to him for opportunities. He added that athletics are a great way to tie in instruction on mental health and conflict resolution.

CM White thanked President Carrico for placing him on the committee. He stated he will look into JFRD and JSO to determine the best ways to incorporate them into the committee's work.

CM Amaro thanked President Carrico for placing him on the committee. He was impressed with the number of stakeholders in the room. He also stated that he saw himself in the demographic being targeted for assistance by the committee. He said he wants the committee to provide hope to the young people who are struggling.

Chair Freeman recalled instances of young people who had died from gun violence to highlight the dire need for the work of the committee and why he feels compelled to do the work.

CM Pittman stated she was committed to the committee's work, recalling her own experience as a young person. She said that they need partners because the government cannot do it alone. She stated there needed to be accessible programs that offer an array of options beyond just college.

Council President Carrico stated he was glad to have the members of the committee and noted the great work being done by the organizations represented in the room. He added that it is never enough and hopes the committee can come up with solutions.

Chair Freeman noted to attendees that he wanted to avoid redundancy in the appropriation of funds and that he may redirect some of the organizations to other avenues for their programming due to the limited funds available for the committee's work.

Public Comment:

Lance Fowt, President of North Florida Building Construction Trades Council, spoke about apprenticeship programs and distinguished them from other workforce development programs. He stated that other workforce development programs focus on training, whereas apprenticeship programs often lead to a career after completion of training. He also expressed frustration at being unable to reach students at local high schools. He stated that they were able to get apprentices working on the Jaguar stadium through local legislation and encouraged more legislation like that in the future.

Kirk Barras, President of Jacksonville General Apprenticeship Association, stated that their apprenticeship programs do not discriminate against workers with criminal backgrounds, but rather the

governments that contract their services. He added that he has tried for nearly 11 years to connect with high school students, but noted it is tough, citing guidance counselors as a key reason.

Shamari Lewis stated that students need customized education, and some need to get away from external factors, such as their home life, which may be impacting their performance. He suggested addressing these external factors additionally.

Anthony Dorsey, of Teen Leaders of America, also expressed difficulty in accessing students at local schools.

John Nooney provided public comment.

Cameron Marshall, a senior at Riverside High School, expressed his gratitude to the committee and requested opportunities for the committee to engage young people.

Meeting adjourned: 4:26 p.m.

Minutes: Brandon Russell, Council Research
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