

**Minutes of the  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee  
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council  
June 4, 2020 Committee Virtual Meeting \***

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Chair Duval called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

**Agenda Item 1: ROLL CALL**

Ms. Heidt called roll.

Committee Members Participating Via Virtual Meeting:

Helene Caseltine	Indian River County
Bruce Redus	Indian River County
Ted Astolfi	Martin County
Pinal Gandhi Savdas	Martin County
Jared Gaylord	Martin County
Charles Duval	Palm Beach County
Gary Hines	Palm Beach County
Alan Chin Lee	Palm Beach County
Thuy Shutt	Palm Beach County
Nepoleon Collins	Palm Beach County
Peter Jones	St. Lucie County
Peter Tesch	St. Lucie County

Excused

Kathie Smith, Alternate	Martin County
Ralph Davino, Alternate	Martin County
Kevin Kryzda	Martin County

Absent:

Kelley Armitage	Indian River County
Nicholas Rojas	Indian River County
Pauline Becker	Martin County
R. Douglas Bynoe	St. Lucie County

Council Staff:

Stephanie Heidt	TCRPC
Thomas J. Lanahan	TCRPC

Guests:

Elijah Wooten	City of Port St. Lucie
Joan Goodrich	BDB of Martin County
Nerissa Okiye	Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing

- \* This meeting was conducted virtually through the GoToMeeting platform pursuant to Florida Governor's Executive Order 20-69 authorizing use of communications media technology to conduct meetings.

## **Agenda Item 2: Agenda Approval**

*Committee Action: Mr. Astolfi moved approval of the agenda. Ms. Caseltine seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

## **Agenda Item 3: Consistency Findings on U.S. Economic Development Administration Applications for Grant Funding**

### Martin County Tourism Grant

Ms. Okiye, Tourism Director for the Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing, provided an overview of the proposed project that will be done in collaboration with the Business Development Board (BDB) of Martin County, Indian River State College (IRSC), and the BizHub team. The proposed project will create a Tourism Accelerator Program and Marketing Recovery Plan, based on the successful BDB Business Accelerator Program. She noted that the plan is consistent with the CEDS plan as it will promote and grow different industries in the area, support existing industries, and welcome new ones.

Ms. Okiye stated that due to the impacts of COVID-19 and environmental issues, they are seeing that it is becoming difficult for the small businesses to recover and pivot, because they do not have the necessary technical skills. She stated the plan is to model the current BDB plan components of how to better market the small businesses and navigate through difficult circumstances by providing a series of courses and a tool kit that can assist with moving these businesses forward. She indicated that the plan should take approximately 18 months to create the plan.

Ms. Caseltine asked if this will be available to businesses in the City of Stuart. Ms. Okiye indicated yes, and that they have been working very closely with the Downtown Stuart Business Association to find out what they need. She stated as they create their plan these discussions will be beneficial, because they want to address real needs and create a plan with real value.

Ms. Caseltine asked if the IRSC partnership will include the small business development center. Ms. Okiye said this will be on a smaller level, mirroring those programs and possibly using the same instructors. She noted that this plan will have a more robust marketing component that will include how to create a digital footprint. Ms. Goodrich, Executive Director of the BDB of Martin County, stated that prior to COVID-19, they were working on a similar concept that focuses on incentives for small businesses in targeted industries.

Ms. Gandhi Savdas asked when this program will be available, noting that the City of Stuart also does a business accelerator program with IRSC. She asked if it is similar to what the BDB is doing. Ms. Goodrich noted that the Stuart/Martin County business accelerator program has been delayed due to COVID-19. She noted that while these programs are designed to complement each other. Ms. Okiye stated that applying for the EDA grant is the first step, and the project is contingent on getting the funding. She

noted that if funding is not obtained, they will continue with the plan, but it will not be as robust.

Mr. Astolfi stated that the current program is great and he support this project because this is really needed for the business community. He commended Ms. Okiye and Ms. Goodrich for putting this together.

Ms. Heidt noted that the project materials contained recommended objectives and actions for consistency with the CEDS Plan. She asked if the Committee members agreed with those findings of consistency. Seeing no Committee comment, Chair Duval called for a motion to find the proposed project consistent with the CEDS Plan.

*Committee Action: Mr. Tesch moved approval of the consistency findings for the Martin County Tourism grant application. Mr. Chin Lee seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

### **Extension of Hegener Drive into Port St. Lucie's Southern Grove Jobs Corridor**

Elijah Wooten, Business Navigator for the City of Port St. Lucie, provided an overview of the grant request to fund infrastructure improvements in the Tradition Center for Commerce. He noted that the City is requesting \$3 million in grant funding to extend Hegener Drive and open up over 100 acres for development. He noted that with the extension of the road the City will be able to retain the TAMCO Group, a City Electric Supply subsidiary, who recently built a 411,00 square foot manufacturing facility, and plans to create 50 jobs over the next 5 years. The new road will also serve to retain OCULUS Surgical, a manufacturer of medical devices, that is planning to expand their operations center. He also noted that there is interest from an aviation manufacturing company that is in the process of purchasing property in the corridor to open a manufacturing facility that will create 125 jobs. Additionally, this project will serve the Somerset Academy, that will focus on technical and skills training for middle and high schools students.

Mr. Wooten stated that the City believes that this project is consistent with the CEDs Plan and will create jobs and capital investment. He noted that in addition to acquiring Martin Memorial Health, Cleveland Clinic has acquired the former VGTI building, which is now the Florida Research and Innovation Center. Also, Torrey Pines was acquired by Florida International University, which has created a great nucleus of manufacturing, healthcare, and research.

Chair Duval asked if there is a pipeline to funnel the Somerset Academy students into available jobs. Mr. Wooten stated that is the intent, but at the present time they are still in the process of deciding if they want to purchase or lease the land. He stated that a couple years ago when the 1,200-acre area was given to the City, they began a plan to have Somerset work directly with industry to advocate for training to fill the jobs that are in demand. He noted that the City also wants the other manufacturers and companies in the area serve on a board of advisors so there is a nexus between industry and education.

Ms. Caseltine asked how Somerset Academy will be accessed without the road extension. Mr. Wooten stated that the property under consideration can be access by Village Parkway. Ms. Caseltine asked if there are plans for the other areas that will be opened up with the road extension. Mr. Wooten indicated that the City is currently working with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) to develop a master plan, which will include how this area is developed. Ms. Caseltine asked what types of industry is anticipated. Mr. Wooten noted that the current master plan for the Southern Grove planned unit developed is a combination of uses such as manufacturing, research and development, office, commercial, retail, and residential. He stated that City staff anticipates the area will be similar to St. Lucie West. He said there is a strong interest in companies wanting to locate to the area, even with COVID-19.

Ms. Gandhi-Savdas asked if the developers are required to contribute any funding for off-site improvements. Mr. Wooten noted that the existing road was funded through a Florida Job Growth grant and contributions from the City. He stated that part of negotiations for land sales in the commerce park area is provision of infrastructure.

*Committee Action: Chair Duval made a motion to find the project consistent with the CEDS Plan. Ms. Caseltine seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

## **REVOLVING LOAN FUND SERVICE AREA AND FUNDING EXPANSION**

Mr. Lanahan indicated that several years ago the South Florida Regional Planning Council (SFRPC) set up a revolving loan fund (RLF) with EDA funds for their region, which includes Monroe, Miami-Dade, and Broward counties. That programs was put together to provide loans for small and medium-sized businesses that could not obtain traditional funding. In 2018, TCRPC authorized the expansion of that program into Palm Beach County, because SFRPC was looking for additional projects to fund. He noted that through CARES Act funding, SFRPC is receiving money to recapitalize their existing RLF program.

Mr. Lanahan noted that the current proposal is to expand the service area to include Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River counties as well as provide additional capital for the current RLF. He noted that this aligns well with EDA's goal of a regional approach. He stated that the proposal is to partner with the SFRPC and extend their current RLF programs, because he feels there is a lot efficiency to be gained by utilizing the administrative apparatus of an already established and successful program. He noted that one challenge is to raise the matching funds that will be needed for the request of \$2.3 Million. He indicated that he has been working with EDA to see if this can be done with 100% federal funding and no required match, but it does not appear that this will be approved. He stated that he has looking at using population per county as a way to calculate what each participating county will be required to provide in matching funds, which works out to be 25% each for Martin and Indian River counties and 50% for St. Lucie County. He indicated he will be working with each of the counties to get commitments on the matching funding before moving forward with submitting the application. He suggested that one way to lower the match amount would be to lower the funding request.

Mr. Chin Lee stated that he has been told by Mr. Vaday to always request what you think is reasonable, and then leave it up to EDA to decide what amount they will fund the project. He stated that he would recommend a request of \$2.3 Million. Ms. Caseltine asked if this would be a request for \$2.3 Million with a match. Mr. Chin Lee stated that the match percentage would remain the same. He stated that what EDA will typically do, depending on the number of applications, is determine which applications are strong and eligible for funding first. Then they will determine if the funding request is warranted based on the scope of the project, or they may reduce the funding request depending on the number of good projects.

Ms. Caseltine asked if there is any criteria that would exempt a project from the match requirement. Mr. Chin Lee indicated that things such as high poverty and high unemployment can qualify for an exemption. He suggested contacting Mr. Vaday early in the application process to get his input. Mr. Lanahan noted that one of the criteria for match exemption is if you are at your taxing authority limits and have fiscal constraints, which would not be the case in our Region.

Ms. Caseltine stated that she supports moving ahead with the proposed project. Mr. Tesch agreed, stating that an RLF program is needed in the Region, and in terms of capacity and scale, it is better to partner into the SFRPC program. He asked if there will be any type of local or regional banking committee established to review potential loans in the Treasure Coast Region, or will that be handled by SFRPC. Mr. Lanahan stated that his inclination is to use SFRPC's administrative apparatus, but TCRPC will promote the program and identify clients in our region.

Ms. Caseltine asked if SFRPC already has the lending criteria established. Mr. Lanahan noted that their program is operated by a staff member that is a retired banker, so he brought their program to a new level.

Mr. Redus stated he looked at the SFRPC program on-line and it appears their minimum for a loan is \$25,000. He asked if the same criteria would apply for smaller communities and if lower loans could be considered. Mr. Lanahan stated he would have to check that with SFRPC. Mr. Redus noted that is something to look at, because our area is more rural, and there might not be a need for that much funding. Mr. Lanahan indicated he will see what is driving that amount, noting that sometimes it is because it takes the same amount of work to loan \$5,000 as it does to loan \$25,000. Mr. Redus asked how the rates are established in the current program. Mr. Lanahan stated that he believes it is an increment above the prime lending rate. He noted that this program is designed to help individuals who cannot otherwise get traditional financing, so the interests rates are very competitive.

Ms. Caseltine asked if commitments from the counties are required to submit the grant application. Mr. Lanahan indicated all three counties would need to provide commitment letters that are required to be included as part of the grant application. She asked when these commitments would be needed. Mr. Lanahan stated that although funding is still available, EDA is processing applications and are eager to get the funding awarded, so it is important to move as quickly as possible. Mr. Redus stated that he has

been in discussions with the SFRPC staff and presented different scenarios, and they have been very receptive to the idea of expanding their lending area.

Mr. Astolfi indicated that he cannot speak on behalf of the Martin Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), but he believes they recognize the need for this type of program and feels confident the match will not be a problem. He stated he believes that the request for \$2.3 Million is reasonable, and it is a great advantage that this is a multi-county proposal, with two regional planning councils working together. He offered his support and encouraged moving ahead with this project as quickly as possible.

*Committee Action: Ms. Caseltine moved approval of finding the proposed application consistent with the CEDS Plan and staff working with each of the County Commission boards for funding commitments. Mr. Astolfi seconded the motion.*

Mr. Jones noted that the St. Lucie County BOCC will be meeting the following Tuesday to discuss the preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021. He suggested making an informal presentation of this project to the Commissioners at that meeting. He stated that he supports this project with the understanding that it is up to each of the County BOCCs to make a final approval for providing any financial commitments.

Upon being put to a vote, the motion passed unanimously.

### **Expansion of Regional Broadband Service**

Ms. Heidt provided an overview of the project, which is to create a plan that will identify infrastructure needs, and public/private partnerships to expand broadband services to underserved communities in an effort to address the “digital divide” in the Region. This plan will focus on ensuring that broadband access is available and affordable for personal home use to connect students to e-learning programs; job seekers to training and employment opportunities; and individuals to telehealth services. Mr. Lanahan noted that broadband has become a necessary service, much like electricity, as we are learning that the economy is moving from the storefront to the living room due to COVID-19. He noted that the request for funding is \$100,000 and he will be requesting Council to approve funding the match of \$20,000.

Mr. Gaylord asked if the funding request is enough. He noted that the Martin County School District has been working on this, and it is more of an issue of need than access. Ms. Heidt indicated that although this project is to create a plan and partnerships opportunities, it will also identify infrastructure projects that are needed and ways to get financing to build those projects, however this funding will not be used to build any of that infrastructure.

Chair Duval indicated that he supports this project and believes that it is a step in the right direction. He noted that the pandemic has really exposed the digital divide, especially in the rural areas, which is preventing many children from being able to get the education they need and keep from falling behind.

*Committee Action: Ms. Caseltine made a motion to find this project consistent with the CEDS Plan. Mr. Gaylord seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

Mr. Lanahan noted that an effort is underway among the economic development organizations and the two regional planning councils in Miami-Dade, Broward, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties to develop a joint plan to address the economic impacts caused by the Coronavirus. The plan will include providing skills training for individuals from the tourist and hospitality industry that will allow them to work in other industries. The plan will also look at Life Sciences and supply chain and logistics opportunities for the four-county region. That project will be brought forward at a future meeting for a consistency finding from the Committee.

Ms. Gandhi-Savdas asked if staff was aware of any other applications that may be coming in for review. Mr. Lanahan stated that one potential project may be an application from IRSC to build a virtual health science lab.

Ms. Shutt stated that the City of Boynton Beach may also have a project to develop a cooperative working program. Mr. Lanahan suggested they get with Ms. Heidt and EDA for preliminary vetting of the application and to get on a future CEDS meeting agenda for the consistency finding. He also congratulated Ms. Shutt on the success of their local business assistance program. Ms. Shutt indicated that they were able to get out \$1 million in 3 weeks, and the process was all done remotely.

Mr. Chin Lee suggested staff may want to ask prospective applicants when they are anticipating completing and submitting their grant applications. If it appears that they will be submitting before the next meeting, then staff can have the Committee consider another emergency meeting. Ms. Heidt indicated she will contact potential applicants and update the Committee as needed.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Public Comment**

None

#### **Agenda Item 5: Staff Comment**

Ms. Heidt thanked the Committee members for their assistance and support with the project consistency recommendations.

#### **Agenda Item 6: CEDS Committee Member Comment**

Mr. Redus expressed his appreciation for staff's work to get these projects moved forward for the Region during these difficult times.

#### **Agenda Item 7: Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Duvall adjourned the meeting at 3:15 p.m.