

# Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency

## Board of Directors

### Workshop Minutes

**Date:** February 18, 2021  
**To:** Board of Directors  
**From:** Benjamin H. Pingree, PLACE Director  
**Subject:** Summary Minutes to Board of Directors Workshop of February 18, 2021

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#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

<b><u>COUNTY</u></b>	<b><u>CITY</u></b>
Commissioner Nick Maddox, Vice-Chair	Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox, Chair
Commissioner Kristin Dozier	Mayor John Dailey
Commissioner Carolyn Cummings	Commissioner Curtis Richardson
Commissioner Brian Welch	Commissioner Jeremy Matlow
Commissioner Rick Minor	Commissioner Jacqueline Porter
Commissioner Jimbo Jackson*	

*\*Virtual Participant*

#### **MEMBERS ABSENT**

<b><u>COUNTY</u></b>	<b><u>CITY</u></b>
Commissioner Bill Proctor	N/A

#### **I. AGENDA MODIFICATIONS**

There were no agenda modifications.

#### **II. WORKSHOP ITEMS**

##### **1. Tallahassee and Leon County's Public Policy Role and Pathways to Job Creation**

Ben Pingree introduced the item, stating that it laid out the challenges met and exceeded by the Office of Economic Vitality (OEV) and provided an overview of the current state of business and the role of local government in job creation and economic vitality.

Cristina Paredes provided a presentation on the item, including defining economic development, the strategic direction provided by the County and City, and public infrastructure investments and support services that lead to job creation. She noted that private sector investments had a tendency to follow major public infrastructure projects and anticipated that Tallahassee-Leon County could see growth similar to the development near Cascades Park, Gaines Street, and Domi Station. Ms. Paredes further stated that County and City services also supported and coordinated private sector growth through optimization of permitting timelines, attracting new investment opportunities, and development of sustainable, people-centered places that enhanced surrounding property values.

Gray Swoope elaborated on government's role in economic development, noting that the greatest force for change was people having meaningful jobs that provided a livable wage. The roles for public policy and decision-making included collaboration, coordination, facilitation, and optimization of assets for Tallahassee-Leon County. The challenge in that was doing it in the private sector and in mitigating the risk for private investors. The IA Board could meet the economic development challenges through public policy that meets the needs of constituents, from job creation and private investment providing holistic benefits for the community in market-driven job growth to community development and competitive projects.

#### Citizen Comment

Stanley Sims spoke to the need for IA Board support for Frenchtown residents.

**Commissioner Welch moved, seconded by Commissioner Maddox, to approve option one.**

**Option 1: Accept the report on Tallahassee and Leon County's Public Policy Role and Pathways to Job Creation.**

**The motion passed 11-0 (weighted 60-0).**

#### 2. Update on the Tallahassee-Leon County Long Term Economic Development Strategic Plan and Report on the Actions of the Office of Economic Vitality

Cristina Paredes provided a presentation on the first five years of OEV, during which OEV began or completed 82% of the actions identified in the Strategic Plan. She highlighted OEV's accomplishments and awards in business formation, tech transfer and commercialization, business retention and expansion, business recruitment, competitive projects, talent pipelines, site selection efforts, and the creative economy. Gray Swoope spoke to job creation through capital investment, the process for competitive projects, and the role OEV plays in building bridges between the assets of Tallahassee-Leon County and local businesses. While complicated processes unfolded behind the scenes, the connections OEV provided, with the IA Board's guidance, created an ease that was evident in business formation successes across the economic development ecosystem.

Gray Swoope stated that the velocity of change experienced by the US economy due to the pandemic, going from record highs to record lows in employment in a matter of weeks, changed the dynamic of business. The framework or strategy for decision-making might be similar. However, means, goals, and implementation of it would look quite different moving forward. A copy of the presentation is on file at Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency.

Steve Evans, Economic Vitality Leadership Council Chair, expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the ecosystem partners in implementing the Strategic Plan. He spoke to the accomplishments achieved through those partnerships and stated that the common theme was measurable economic impact on Tallahassee-Leon County. He

spoke to the rate of change acceleration of around the world, which is faster than industries could easily adapt, much less people. To address these changes, the EVLC recommended that the IA Board approve the amendment to the Vision First Advisors' contract to update the economic development Strategic Plan going forward. The timing was critical to Tallahassee-Leon County and Vision First Advisors had the knowledge, vision, and expertise necessary. Cristina Paredes provided comments on behalf of Keith Bowers, the MWSBE CAC Chair, who experienced technical difficulties and was unable to address the IA Board.

#### Citizen Comment

Stanley Sims spoke to the need for additional jobs, even in economically depressed areas, citing the success of a restaurateur in Atlanta, GA.

Karen Woodall spoke to her desire of the Florida People's Advocacy Center to support the economic development of Frenchtown. She stated that the community was in critical need of soft skills development in order to build their own self-worth, create a greater sense of security in their homes, and foster entrepreneurship.

Commissioner Williams-Cox acknowledged that Commissioner Jackson was joining the IA Board workshop virtually.

**Commissioner Dozier moved, seconded by Commissioner Minor, to allow Commissioner Jackson to participate via Webex.**

**The motion passed 10-0 (weighted: 60-0).**

Per the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency Telephonic Policy, Commissioner Jackson's participation did not count towards a quorum, but he was eligible to vote.

**Mayor Dailey moved, seconded by Commissioner Richardson, to approve options one and two.**

**Option 1: Accept the Status Report on Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality Strategic Planning.**

**Option 2: Approval to amend contract with VisionFirst Advisors (VFA) to update the Economic Development Strategic Plan reflecting new data, current trends, economic inclusion, and the effects of COVID-19 upon the economic landscape.**

Commissioner Minor spoke to using the competitive advantage of being the Magnetic Capital of the World as a strategy for Tallahassee-Leon County to compete with larger cities. He requested that the updated plan consider doubling down on that type of approach. Gray Swoope stated that in regards to asset optimization of an economic development strategy, the MagLab held a competitive advantage that most locations could not replicate. The access to intellectual capital and the ability to integrate it into economic development was definitely a strategy that the IA Board should continue along with other innovations coming from the universities. Commissioner Minor spoke to the need to focus on the magnetic technology advantage regarding

competitive projects. He strongly believed that it was necessary to hire folks to work alongside the tech companies in larger markets, who were on the cusp of the new technology.

Commissioner Matlow stated that the IA Board often discussed economic inequality, systemic racism, etc. and felt the need to act deliberately on the item. The Minority Women Small Business Enterprise Division was doing great work, yet the bottom line, he stated, was that people did not have access to capital. Access through OEV that required the same rules as traditional lenders only created more access for people who already had access to capital. The risk in lending to non-traditional startups could be mitigated through training, mentorship, and critical back-end support.

Commissioner Matlow acknowledged the finite resources available to OEV. Each project was presented with number of jobs created and economic impact but not opportunity costs. For example, considering the jobs that could be created by allocating \$30 million to one project or distributing that amount across multiple projects. Lastly, he stated that the IA Board had not yet established an equal access process for people to request funding for a project to the IA Board. He wanted to be sure that was fleshed out for the future.

Regarding access to capital, Cristina Paredes stated that Leon County recently utilized \$1 million of CARES Act funds to create a partnership with the FAMU Federal Credit Union specifically designed to address minority and women-owned businesses that did not have traditional access to capital. The program is open to people with low credit scores, and FAMU FCU was providing counseling, mentorship, and referrals to the FAMU Small Business Centers for support with a business plan.

Commissioner Porter stated that economic development required a shift in ideological temperament about the role of the public sector. The world was witnessing profound changes in demographics, the market, and culture through consumer demand that changed the rules of economic prosperity. She agreed with and supported a greater emphasis on local businesses, urban density and diversity, cultural and arts, and public transit with bike-friendly, walkable neighborhoods. She was curious about the considerations made for those trends that were beneficial to economic development because she believed the IA Board had taken action as opposed to an accepted philosophy.

Commissioner Porter stated that historically, public policy concentrated market power that worked against local businesses. An issue that was repeatedly brought up through access to capital for local businesses and small projects versus huge development projects. She listed other issues, including misguided and outdated zoning policies, high real estate costs that prohibited local businesses from acquiring property, financing terms that incentivized property owners to rent to chains rather than to local companies, and banking consolidation and the decline of local financial institutions. She felt that those issues were missing from the update; however, they provided context to major trends that effected the national and local economies. She stated that affordable housing, public safety, process of public trust, and racial and income disparities all played a role in economic vitality. She further stated that items she felt should be addressed in the Strategic Plan update included making it easier to

renovate vacant buildings, creating space for local businesses in new developments, and correcting zoning issues.

Commissioner Richardson questioned the status of manufacturing and distribution in Tallahassee-Leon County. He referenced the Family Dollar and new Amazon last mile facility in Marianna and felt certain that Tallahassee-Leon County could compete with regional communities to recruit businesses that provided high-wage, blue-collar jobs. He felt that those were additional areas to make a concerted effort on that would reduce the reliance on state government jobs. Cristina Paredes stated that Manufacturing and Logistics sector was a targeted industry. OEV staff was able to provide resources to manufacturers in nurturing the career ladder, utilizing apprenticeships, or through the Big Bend Manufacturing Association. Commissioner Richardson stressed the importance of collaborating with Lively Technical College and Tallahassee Community College to retain local talent from career and technical programs.

Regarding zoning and building permits for new facilities, Commissioner Dozier stated that both City and County Growth Management Departments made significant efficiency improvements. For facilities that needed variances to urban design standards, that time increased. She questioned if zoning could be addressed through the economic development Strategic Plan. Gray Swoope stated that for the core strategy and the day-to-day operations, of OEV to be successful, the Strategic Plan had to incorporate enabling strategies like those mentioned by Commissioner Porter. He noted that zoning and permitting were enabling strategies that helped OEV reach their core objective and were pieces that could be evaluated systemically.

Commissioner Dozier also requested additional information on the regional focus of the Strategic Plan update and the reasons behind that. Gray Swoope stated that he first considers the product of Tallahassee-Leon County and communities with which Tallahassee-Leon County could compete. Broadening to a regional view allowed for marketing of additional sites that might not be in Leon County but are nevertheless considered Tallahassee sites. Furthermore, it benefited the people living in and around Tallahassee-Leon County as any of the businesses considering relocation provided tuition reimbursement.

Lastly, Commissioner Dozier questioned the trends in public economic development organizations, transparency, and the benefit of collaboration, or lack of, across other programs. Gray Swoope stated that the model that worked for one community could be a disaster in another; it was up to the IA Board to determine what worked for Tallahassee-Leon County. The key element in the current model for OEV was the voice of the customer. Job creators and community investors were the people whose voices needed to be heard in order for the IA Board to make solid policy decisions.

**The motion passed 11-0 (weighted 60-0).**

### **III. CITIZENS TO BE HEARD ON NON-AGENDAED ITEMS**

Public comments were received by email to [Comments@BlueprintIA.org](mailto:Comments@BlueprintIA.org) through 5:00 p.m. on December 9, 2020. All comments received by that time were provided to

the IA Board. Live comments were also taken in person and via WebEx during the meeting. Those comments are summarized below.

There were no additional speakers.

**VI. ADJOURN**

**The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.**

*The next Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency Board of Directors Meeting  
is scheduled for*

**February 18, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.**