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

**Meeting Minutes**

**June 17, 2024, 12:30 p.m.**

**Location:** Lynwood Roberts Room, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Chairman Raul Arias; Council Member Ken Amaro; Council Member Terrance Freeman (visiting)

**Also:** Phillip Peterson, Council Auditor’s Office; Shannon MacGillis, Office of the General Counsel; Gregory Grant, JSEB Administrator; Wanyonyi Kendrick, Chief Information Officer

**Meeting Convened:** 12:30 p.m.

Council Member Arias thanked all involved with the Special Committee for their work and introduced Gregory Grant, JSEB administrator, to discuss accomplishments of this Special Committee and of the JSEB program over the past several months. Dr. Grant explained technology projects, including digitization of the JSEB application process, transparency data dashboards, and a dedicated website set to launch in July. He noted that the JSEB program had launched 3 new marketing initiatives, including a broadcast commercial and “guerilla marketing” efforts. He noted that the Council had approved two full-time staff positions (a full-time administrative aide and a business compliance position) through its passage of 2024-0294-E. He noted that the JSEB program has onboarded nearly 100 new JSEBs during the charge of the JSEB Special Committee and that additional staff would be required to meet growing interest in the program. He noted that 2024-0437, which

proposed several Ordinance Code amendments to improve the JSEB program, was currently in Committee and was scheduled for final action before the full Council on June 25, 2024.

Council Member Arias asked Wanyonyi Kendrick, City Chief Information Officer, to answer questions regarding technology initiatives. Ms. Kendrick provided a statement of work and noted that the online JSEB application would be up and running by July 1<sup>st</sup>, with DocuSign integration planned by the end of the fiscal year. She explained that this online application would result in cost savings of about \$1.4 million for the City, as it would eliminate the need to involve third parties in the application process. Council Member Arias asked Ms. Kendrick whether DocuSign integration would require additional legislation, and Ms. Kendrick stated that it would not.

Ms. Kendrick explained the Transparency Dashboard project, which would provide data to JSEBs regarding CIP projects and grant opportunities at the Council district level. She explained the planned JSEB website, which is being designed by the same team that designed the Jacksonville.gov website. Council Member Arias asked whether the JSEB website would have its own landing page, and Ms. Kendrick stated that it would be accessible through the Jacksonville.gov website. Council Member Arias asked about the specific look of the website, and Dr. Grant responded that there had been initial meetings but that the final design was not yet finalized. Council Member Arias suggested involving JSEBs in designing the website so that it would meet their needs. Dr. Grant stated that it was a goal to have the website fully functional by the end of the fiscal year; Council Member Arias clarified with Dr. Grant that the online application would be launching on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Council Member Amaro asked how the JSEB website would be accessed (whether it would be accessible via drop-down menu or have a more noticeable vehicle to drive traffic to the page). Ms. Kendrick stated that these details had not yet been fully decided and that the administration was open to ideas on how to provide access to the website. Council Member Arias stated that he would like the website's link to be easy-to-remember and marketable. Ms. Kendrick stated that all ideas were welcome at this point but that she would not want to completely disassociate the JSEB website from the Jacksonville.gov website.

Council Member Freeman expressed excitement for the work that JSEB staff and the Special Committee had done to revitalize the program, noting that it was an extension of the work done by prior pilot programs and JSEB Special Committees. He noted that JEA, JAA, JAXPORT, and other utilities have their own websites that can also be accessed through Jacksonville.gov. He commended JSEB staff on their ability to save \$1.4 million through the creation of the online application, noting that technological upgrades had been resisted by City entities in the past. Ms. Kendrick said that she is excited to share project updates with the full Council when they are completed and that these technological updates would provide increased access to the benefits of the JSEB program for small businesses. Council Member Arias stated that these savings were a big win for the City and that the online application portal could serve as a model for other City departments.

Council Member Arias asked when the City would be hiring the new positions authorized by 2024-0294-E, and Dr. Grant answered that the positions would be publicly advertised shortly, with interviews likely beginning the following week. Council Member Arias noted that, in addition to authorizing the two new positions, the bill authorized pay increases for existing positions. He asked when these pay raises would go into effect, and Dr. Grant answered that they would go into effect in mid-July. Dr. Grant also reiterated that the new administrative

aide position was changing from an existing part-time position to a full-time position and that the existing part-time employee had been working overtime.

Dr. Grant explained bill 2024-0437, which was in Committees this week and was scheduled for final action at the June 25, 2024 Council Meeting. The bill made three major amendments to the Ordinance Code regarding JSEB: it removed a bond enhancement program, which Dr. Grant found to be duplicative and unnecessary shortly upon assuming the position of JSEB administrator; it changed the re-certification requirement for JSEBs from every 24 months to every 36 months, as Dr. Grant had found the requirement of 24 months to be burdensome to both JSEBs and to JSEB staff; and it changed the “graduation” requirement from 9 years to 15 years, strongly encouraging “JSEB Prime Members” who have participated in the program for 9 years to serve as mentors to other participants, as Dr. Grant had found that pushing JSEBs out of the program after 9 years robbed the program of valuable institutional knowledge that longer-tenured JSEBs could provide as mentors to newer JSEBs.

On the removal of the bond program, Dr. Grant explained that there are other sources by which JSEBs can receive bonding assistance and that many “Tier 1” JSEB projects do not require bonding, as they are below the requirement. He stated that the changing of the recertification timeline should boost participant retention. Council Member Arias asked when these changes would go into effect, and Shannon MacGillis of the Office of the General Counsel explained that they would go into effect upon the Mayor’s signature of the bill (or the Mayor’s returning of the bill unsigned). She stated that the bill, if passed by Council and approved by the Mayor, would likely go into effect around July 1. Council Member Freeman asked whether there was any available data to demonstrate that the amending of the recertification requirement would result in increased retention; he also asked whether there was data to demonstrate that retaining larger JSEBs for longer would not negatively impact smaller JSEBs in their attempts to receive contracts. Dr. Grant answered that he could provide data outside of this meeting, and Council Member Arias noted that he had discussed evidence to back up Dr. Grant’s claims outside of this meeting. Dr. Grant added that the primary purpose of extending the graduation requirement was to provide mentorship for smaller, younger JSEBs.

Council Member Arias asked how JSEB staff planned to use remaining funds appropriated to JSEB, and Dr. Grant answered that he would look to use these funds to further build out marketing efforts. Dr. Grant explained future considerations that could result in further Ordinance Code amendments, including potentially disbanding the JSEB Monitoring Committee and add a requirement for the JSEB administrator to present at regular intervals to the Rules or Finance Committees; changing the language regarding the 20% JSEB city goal for contracts to be tracked based on the “dollar value of contracts awarded” to the “dollar value of contract payments”; moving the Disparity Study from the Equal Business Opportunity (“EBO”) Office and JSEB staff to the Jacksonville Human Rights Council (“JHRC”); and increasing the minimum funding program requirements by \$200,000 to manage JSEB Entrepreneurship Education and Workforce Development Initiatives. Council Member Arias asked whether these changes would require further legislation, and Ms. MacGillis answered that they would and that she would relay the message to those in the Government Operations Department in the Office of the General Counsel.

Council Member Arias stated that he would like to further discuss these ideas for further action despite this meeting being the JSEB Special Committee’s final meeting. Council Member Amaro noted that these concerns

regarding the effectiveness of the JSEB Monitoring Committee had been held at previous JSEB Special Committee meetings and questioned why there had not been action on this matter. He asked Dr. Grant to explain the rationale behind the change in language of the 20% JSEB requirement, and Dr. Grant answered that changing how this 20% is measured would better represent JSEB involvement. Council Member Amaro asked Dr. Grant to explain why the JHRC would be better suited to oversee the completion of the Disparity Study than JSEB staff, and Dr. Grant explained that the fact that JSEB had to oversee a disparity study while being a race and gender-neutral program presented a difficult legal situation for JSEB staff.

Council Member Arias asked whether Council Member Freeman had any reservations about any of these future considerations. Council Member Freeman explained that he would rather see the JSEB Monitoring Committee altered rather than disbanded; he stated that Board Members and JSEB administration might feel differently about the effectiveness of the committee if the committee had broader authority to hold the JSEB administrator accountable. He stated that he believed that this oversight purpose would be better served by a dedicated board than by the Council. He explained that he also had reservations about moving the Disparity Study to JHRC, first explaining historical information about JSEB's initially being a racially-targeted program and then changing to a racially-neutral program upon the outcome of a lawsuit, and then explaining that he believed the JHRC to often be political in its decisions.

Dr. Grant acknowledged several interns who had been working for JSEB staff so that the program would be able to handle increased interest.

**Public Comment:**

Josephine Jackson explained that her business had started with the JAX Bridges Entrepreneurship Program through JAX Chamber and that she had received great benefit through the JSEB program, specifically the Bidmore program. She stated that she was excited about the streamlining of the website and added that the Council should look to assist smaller, younger JSEBs in receiving contracts.

Ty Grady stated that he supported the vision of the administration to make Jacksonville the small business capital of the Southeast and the country. He stated that his time in the real estate industry had helped him to understand the importance of small business development and thanked Dr. Grant for all of his work in revitalizing the JSEB program, noting that he had met Dr. Grant through Representative John Rutherford.

Rose Pierre noted that the Council could strengthen its partnership with JEA, JTA, and other utilities to involve JSEBs in contract opportunities. She stated that many small business owners looked to meaningfully participate in society through their businesses and explained the many challenges that she faces as a small business owner (CEO of East Coast Striping and Painting). She explained the benefit that she receives through the Bidmore program.

Shereline Redden, CEO of the Preservation Firm, stated that she had been able to gain 11 clients over the past six months through the connections that she had gained through JSEB and through her work as a Bidmore coach. She explained that she had won a contract since the last JSEB Special Committee meeting as a result of

the knowledge that she had gained through the JSEB and Bidmore programs. She thanked Gabe Hamda for the work that he does in the Bidmore program and explained that the small business community requires public capital investment in order to thrive.

Council Member Arias thanked everyone for their work throughout the charge of the JSEB Special Committee and adjourned the meeting.

**Meeting adjourned:** 1:36 p.m.

Minutes: Eamon Webb, Council Research Division

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