



## OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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### JACKSONVILLE SMALL & EMERGING BUSINESS SPECIAL COMMITTEE

**April 7, 2025**  
**9:30 am**

**Location:** Lynwood Roberts Room

**In attendance:** Council Members Arias (Chair), Amaro, Johnson

**Also:** Gregory Grant – JSEB; Shannon MacGillis – Office of General Counsel; Trista Carraher – Council Auditor’s Office; Brandon Russell – Council Research

**Meeting Convened:** 9:31 am

Chair Arias began the meeting by inviting Shannon MacGillis, Office of General Counsel, to review the actions taken from the last meeting. She noted that action still needed to be taken on Initiatives B, D, E, F, and G from the agenda.

Council Member Johnson responded to some of the concerns raised in public comment. He stated that the committee's work is to change the ordinance code to right-size JSEB. He noted that the construction of the JSEB centers is a function of the Administration. He agreed with the Chair that another meeting would be necessary. He also stated his desire to bring in more agencies to discuss leveraging the B2G System to streamline the application process.

Council Member Amaro suggested beginning with Mr. Jamison from JHRC to discuss the disparity study. In response to public comments, Chair Arias asked Gregory Grant, JSEB, how they decided upon the location for the JSEB center on Golfair Blvd and if there was input for the community. Mr. Grant stated that they received directives from the administration and that there were conversations with other businesses in the area who were supportive. He was not aware of any formal community center. Chair Arias asked when the decision was made; Mr. Grant stated the decision was made last year. Chair Arias said it was unsettling since promises were made to create a community center in the area and wants to table the Golfair Blvd location until further discussion is had regarding community concerns. Chair Arias asked whether JSEB centers had already opened; Mr. Grant confirmed that the proposed centers would be the first.

The committee then discussed the disparity study initiative. Chair Arias noted that they did not finish the discussion on the topic. Council Member Johnson reiterated that they should move the disparity study to

Data Analytics. Chair Arias asked Mr. Grant if he initially wanted the study to be housed elsewhere, preferably at the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission. Mr. Grant stated that he was in the same posture of moving the study to another department. Council Member Johnson asked Mr. Grant to clarify whether he wants JHRC to be the department that conducts the study. Mr. Grant stated again that he would like to see the disparity study in another department but was not tied to it being moved to the JHRC any longer. Mr. Grant stated that JHRC's purpose was incompatible with the disparity study.

Rudy Jamison, JHRC, was invited to the podium for questions. Mr. Jamison clarified that JHRC focuses on discriminatory complaints regarding housing, public accommodation, employment, and equal opportunity and access. He noted that the disparity study did not align with their duties per the Ordinance Code. Council Member Amaro asked Mr. Jamison to explain in more detail why the disparity study would not fit within the mission of JHRC. Mr. Jamison stated that small businesses are often beyond the jurisdiction of the JHRC to investigate because they have 15 or fewer employees. Brittany Norris from the Administration clarified that the JHRC reacts to instances of discrimination, whereas the disparity study is a more proactive data collection tool.

Chair Arias asked the committee if they wanted to act on the initiative. Council Member Amaro stated he thinks the issue requires more discussion and does not think Data Analytics is a sustainable place for the study to be housed. Council Member Johnson noted that regardless of the specific department, the disparity study should be produced by the executive branch with a date for submission of the study.

Chair Arias said that more discussion was needed and discharged the issue of the disparity study, which will remain with JSEB.

The committee then moved to the reciprocity program initiative. Mr. Grant reviewed the reciprocity initiative, which would create opportunities for JSEBs to work in other counties. Chair Arias reiterated that the committee would act on this issue and noted in the last meeting that he wanted to begin with a pilot program in St. Johns County for a year. Council Member Amaro stated he liked the idea since it provided business opportunities and recalled the concept of assessing a fee from other counties to support the program.

Council Member Amaro asked Mr. Grant what an agreement would look like with the other counties. Mr. Grant said he created a sample of what a pilot program would look like. He said they would have a roundtable with the counties to establish agreements on the pilot program. During the pilot program, they would identify projects that could be used in the current JSEB portfolio. He stated he had already spoken with St. John's County and that they agreed with these terms. Chair Arias asked why he had not had conversations with Baker County. Mr. Grant stated this was due to scheduling conflicts. Chair Arias restated that he would only consider a pilot program if the other counties paid a fee. Ed Randolph, Office of Economic Development, stated they are developing a fee structure associated with the pilot program. Chair Arias asked for clarification from OGC about how to incorporate the fee into legislation. Ms. MacGillis stated that the council would have to approve the fee.

Council Member Johnson asked OGC if they would need to act on the motion before moving to other matters. She confirmed and relayed that an MOU must also go before the council. Council Member Johnson stated his motion to create the reciprocity program. Chair Arias clarified that this motion began the discussion about a pilot program for just St. Johns County. Council Member Johnson also pushed back against the pilot program with St. Johns, stating that using only one county would not give them valuable data. He then asked Chair Arias how he sees the reciprocity agreement threatening growth in Duval County. Chair Arias said he wants to see if JSEB can manage with the current staffing. He also wants dollars awarded to JSEBs to go mainly to those located in Jacksonville. He also noted that JSEB is asking for more money and wants to make sure that there is a fee to accommodate expansion into other

counties. Brittany Norris from the Administration stated they would like more time to create a more thorough plan for the pilot program to ensure that JSEB can accommodate an expected increase in non-profit JSEBs and protect taxpayers. She also asked if that could be presented as a report about two months later.

**Action:** Council Member Amaro moved an amendment to the Johnson motion, which would make the Johnson amendment a time-certain pilot program limited to St. Johns County.

Chair Arias stated that whichever route they went would be a win for each county and asked how long it would take to get data. Mr. Grant said he thinks at least a year would be required to get data from the pilot program. Chair Arias recommended the data collection period run through March 1, 2026.

**Action:** The committee voted in favor of the Amaro amendment 2-1; Council Member Johnson opposed.

Council Member Johnson opposed the amendment because isolating only one county would produce invalid data. He asked Mr. Grant what he thought about having only one county. Mr. Grant said expanding to all counties would expand opportunities for JSEBs and allow them to provide better resources for other agencies. He also noted that JTA already has a Local Small Business Enterprise (LSBE) program open to all other counties. He stated that when a business becomes a JSEB, it automatically becomes LSBE but not vice versa.

**Action:** The committee then passed the Johnson motion as amended 2-1; Council Member Johnson opposed.

The committee then discussed expanding the JSEB Prime initiative. Mr. Grant explained the program and said they want to continue supporting JSEBs with resources and opportunities even though they have aged out of the program. Ms. MacGillis asked for clarification regarding the expansion of the JSEB Prime program. Mr. Grant explained that after 15 years, they can continue in the Prime program for 9 years. They are not eligible to receive JSEB set-aside contracts but can receive resources and additional support while mentoring younger JSEBs.

**Action:** The committee moved and voted unanimously to approve the expansion of the JSEB Prime program.

Mr. Randolph, Office of Economic Development, asked if the reciprocity motion was mandatory, citing concerns with staffing and feasibility. Chair Arias stated it was not mandatory; the recommendation passed by the committee would give them the latitude to determine their capacity to support the pilot program and report back any data they collected in Spring 2026.

Mr. Grant then explained the centralized database-sharing initiative. He stated the main objective of this initiative is to simplify the process to become JSEB certified. He pointed out there was a different process for all the other small business programs across the city's various agencies. Mr. Grant also stated that all agencies use the B2Gnow system; the City of Jacksonville is the only body that does not use it. He recommended that City also use that system to access small businesses' certification data and streamline the JSEB certification process.

Chair Arias asked if there was a cost to start the database-sharing; Mr. Grant identified an initial price of \$30,000 with recurring annual payments less than that amount. Council Member Johnson stated that database sharing is necessary but thinks the cost will be less and could save money through more efficient work processes. Council Member Amaro agreed. Chair Arias asked if JSEB would request money to begin the database-sharing process. Mr. Grant says if it costs \$30,000 for the initial setup, he will need to

request money but would not need it for the estimated \$10,000 annually recurring payments. Chair Arias asked when he would request the funds; Mr. Grant said they could request it now if the committee were ready.

**Action:** Council Member Johnson moved to start the database-sharing agreement on October 1<sup>st</sup>. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Arias stated that they would not be able to get to the final initiative. He scheduled the additional meeting for April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 9:30 AM.

**Public Comment:**

Lydia Bell, President of Metro Gardens Neighborhood Association, asked why the Brentwood community was not notified of the new JSEB center.

Wells Todd asked how many JSEB centers exist in Jacksonville and how successful they have been at creating jobs. He noted the morgue under construction in the area. He stated that the community felt disrespected because they were promised the opportunity to provide input on how the location would be used.

James Matchett stated his support for JSEB's work but questioned the new center's construction. He noted that a center already exists on Main Street and questioned how effective it would ultimately be. He also said that members of the community were promised a community center.

Mike Ludwick, Northside Coalition of Jacksonville, stated he and his organization wanted to see more contracts and subcontracts going to minority and women-owned businesses, citing recent disparity studies. He said the disparity study must continue; otherwise, the council may claim no disparity. He stated that his organization is agnostic in which department completes the study. He agreed with Mr. Grant that reporting should include all city contracting. He also agreed with the addition of reporting dollars spent and the number of contracts and dollars awarded. He also stated that JSEB contracting should be mandated.

Katrina Spencer commented on the construction of the morgue. She stated that she felt the construction of the morgue has been disruptive and will negatively impact property values. She also noted the community was promised a community center.

President of Magnolia Garden Development and Four Star Plumbing, Inc., Robert Flournoy, stated he was a JSEB plumbing contractor. He noted that affirmative action did not work because the City changed the code to keep African Americans from getting contracts. He also stated he had never gotten a job with the city despite being a JSEB because the larger contractors were given preference. He referenced a disparity study provided to Mayor Brown's administration that showed African American JSEBs received only one percent of contracts.

Gabe Hamda, President of ICATT Professional Services and Head Coach of BidMore, shared some observations. He stated the JSEB office knows the people that they support. He noted that the CEOs of the JSEBs understand what they are doing. He said that entrepreneurs are stretched thin. He noted the overlapping network of organizations beyond JSEB and encouraged collaboration among them. He stated his desire to highlight the stories of entrepreneurs in the community. He recommended opening up international trade for local businesses and highlighting entrepreneurs who are inventors.

**Meeting adjourned:** 11:00 am.

Minutes: Brandon Russell, Council Research  
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