



**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
RESEARCH DIVISION**

117 WEST DUVAL STREET, SUITE 425
4TH FLOOR, CITY HALL
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202
904-255-5137

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

Meeting Minutes

April 3, 2024, 10:30 a.m.

Location: Council Chambers, 1st floor, City Hall

In attendance: Chairman Raul Arias; Council Member Mike Gay

Also: Trista Carraher, Council Auditor’s Office; Shannon MacGillis, Office of the General Counsel; Eamon Webb, Research Division; Gregory Grant, JSEB Administrator

Meeting Convened: 10:30 a.m.

Chairman Raul Arias called the meeting to order. He noted that the Committee would be discussing an Ordinance that would appropriate funds for new positions for JSEB. CM Grant asked Gregory Grant, JSEB administrator, whether Mr. Grant could report any progress on the technology projects discussed at previous meetings. Mr. Grant stated that he could provide an update on these projects once JSEB’s merger into the Office of Economic Development had been completed, likely in July. CM Arias noted that the remaining available funding amount reflected after the proposed appropriation for staff could be used for these projects.

Gabe Hamda of ICATT Consulting, Inc. gave a presentation on the Bidmore program. He explained that the program aims to increase bid frequency for small businesses by providing encouragement to submit at

least five bid proposals per month, by training businesses on how to prepare bid proposals, by providing hands-on coaching to develop bid proposals, and by providing access to technology resources to accelerate bid frequency. He noted that Bidmore is the only program of its kind nationally. The program seeks to lift up “Tier I” JSEBs so that they can grow, noting that this group makes up 50% of all total JSEBs. He explained that the program is currently performing at a “college football” level even though it is being funded at a “high school football” level and added that the program should have its funding be “college football” level so that it can perform at a “professional football” level.

The outcomes that ICATT and Bidmore would seek to provide with additional funding would be robust outreach efforts, continuous reinvention, the harnessing of emerging technologies, tailoring services to a digitally-challenged population, and transforming the economy of small businesses into an interdependent ecosystem. He added that ICATT is attempting to expand the Bidmore program beyond Jacksonville, and expansion would help to make Jacksonville a small businesses hub.

CM Arias asked about the investment into Bidmore and ICATT and the number of businesses that have been assisted through the program. Sandy Simpson, EBO Financial Analyst, stated that around \$160,000 had been invested into this program; Gabe Hamda stated that participation among JSEBs had risen from around 10% to around 33% and that around 100 JSEBs per month were provided service. Mr. Grant explained that the JSEB program had received 30 new applications over the past 90 days, a significantly increased rate of applications, and new JSEBs typically take advantage of ICATT opportunities, so participation in this program would only grow. Because of this likely growth, he added, he would like to see ICATT’s funding increased by \$80,000 to \$100,000. CM Arias noted that the increase in applications reflected the quality work being done by Mr. Grant and JSEB staff and agreed that a funding increase would be deserved.

CM Gay asked whether he had worked with the Procurement Division to improve opportunities for JSEBs in receiving City contracts; Mr. Grant answered that JSEB staff was working with the Procurement Division but that there would likely not be any updates on policy change recommendations until after the OED merger, likely in July. CM Gay asked whether businesses could be organized categorically so that those looking to contract with JSEBs could easily find a business relevant to their search, and Mr. Grant noted that this would be one of the major design points of a new website.

Shannon MacGillis of the Office of the General Counsel explained the prospective legislation regarding JSEB staffing; it would provide for two full-time positions and salary increases for existing positions. CM Arias asked Gregory Grant, JSEB administrator, whether this Ordinance should be introduced on a regular schedule or an emergency schedule; Mr. Grant stated that a regular bill cycle would be sufficient.

CM Arias asked about the other potential ordinance changes that had been discussed at previous meetings. Mr. Grant recapped that he would like to see the bond enhancement program removed, as it was a redundancy and its removal would open up funds for other purposes; the graduation (or “termination”) requirement removed, as allowing long-time JSEBs to stay in the program would increase institutional knowledge and benefit efforts to better the mentoring program; and the recertification requirement changed from every two years to every three years to make it less burdensome to JSEBs. Ms. MacGillis asked whether this could be introduced as one ordinance, and Mr. Grant stated that one ordinance

including all of these changes would be ideal. CM Arias asked whether this could be introduced by the JSEB Special Committee, and Ms. MacGillis answered that this would be acceptable. CM Arias instructed that the ordinance with the proposed policy changes be ready for the next JSEB Special Committee meeting.

Public Comment:

Julius Richardson expressed profound gratitude to Mr. Grant, the JSEB program, and Bidmore for their coaching and mentorship, as he had received a solicitation award with their assistance. He felt that the JSEB program and Bidmore are truly committed to empowering small businesses within the community.

Shereline Redden stated that Bidmore had helped to empower her to chase larger contracts than she would have chased on her own, and as a result of seeing the good work that Bidmore does, has become a coach within the program herself. She stated that the program helps small businesses in the community to connect with like-minded business owners.

E.C. Weston of Lit TV Network explained that he hopes to grow his business to be a Tier III JSEB and that his business will help to broadcast the stories of small businesses and their owners. He stated that he would like Lit TV Network to become JSEB's official media company to help provide necessary exposure for small businesses, and he felt as though this administration was truly invested in seeing the success of small businesses including minority-owned small businesses, as Donna Deegan and Joyce Morgan both advertised their campaigns on the Lit TV Network platform.

Tellisa Robinson of Eastcoast Striping and Painting, Inc. recognized the dedication of Mr. Grant. She explained that supporting small businesses will support economic growth among minority communities, and she noted that the support of local government in empowering minority business owners makes a difference.

Carnell Oliver stated that he disagreed with the proposal to remove the graduation requirement from the JSEB program as he would prefer to see efforts to constantly bring in new membership. He explained that he felt the OED merger would provide opportunities to provide additional resources to the JSEB program. He stated that small business owners should have educational opportunities regarding state and federal policies that affect them and voiced support for a tax exemption for minority business owners.

Alia Baldwin of Whoa Productions stated that she would like to provide life coaching for retirees, the homeless, and the disabled. She explained that her business had invested in marketing efforts but needed a physical space to conduct business. CM Arias explained that this was not a venue to ask for funding but would discuss potential opportunities with Ms. Baldwin after the meeting.

Sharron Collins of MPowerment U explained that she was a self-published author and that her business is seeking funding opportunities to create a safe space for runaways, the homeless, and single mothers to speak about the pains within their lives and turn that pain into power.

Luigi DiFranco explained that his business was close to “graduating” from JSEB but that he had only recently begun to truly take advantage of the opportunities that are provided through the program. He stated that his business was a perfect example of one that would benefit from the removal of the graduation requirement and that he would like to be a mentor for new JSEBs and provide institutional knowledge as part of continued membership.

Starr Prescott explained that her business provides hair restoration services to those with alopecia. Her business joined JSEB in November, and she expressed that she is grateful to JSEB and to the Bidmore program, as it had been difficult to market her unique business without their backing.

Latasha Phinnessee of Phinnessee Guard Services noted that her business was in the second year of the JSEB program. She expressed her gratitude to Mr. Grant, ICATT, and the Bidmore program, and she voiced support for the increasing of funding for JSEB and for the Bidmore program.

CM Arias stated that the ordinance with the discussed policy changes would be ready for the next meeting. The meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned: 11:32 a.m.

Minutes: Eamon Webb, Council Research Division

ewebb@coj.net 904-255-5140

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