

SWFRPC FY2012 BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

July 12, 2011

The SWFRPC's FY2012 Budget Committee held a meeting/conference call on July 12, 2011 at the offices of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council.

Committee Members

Councilwoman Teresa Heitmann, City of Naples
Vice Mayor Mick Denham, City of Sanibel
Commissioner Karson Turner, Hendry County BOCC
Ms. Laura Holquist, Lee County Governor Appointee
Mr. Bob Mulhere, Collier County Governor Appointee
Commissioner Butch Jones, Glades County BOCC

Others

Ms. Liz Donley, SWFRPC Legal Counsel
Ms. Janice Yell, Finance Manager
Ms. Nancy Doyle, HR Operations Manager
Mr. Don Scott, Lee County MPO Director
Ms. Nichole Gwinnett, Administrative Staff Specialist
Mr. Tim Walker, GIS Manager
Mr. David Crawford, Principal Planner
Mr. Dan Trescott, DRI Coordinator
Mr. Jason Utley, Senior Planner
Mr. Dan Cobb, GIS Specialist

Vice Mayor Denham called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. He then gave an overview of the Executive Committee meeting which was held earlier that day. He noted that Mr. Heatherington had tendered his resignation which was the context of the meeting.

Commissioner Jones asked Vice Mayor Denham what kind of termination package Mr. Heatherington is receiving. Vice Mayor Denham replied that it is in accordance to the terms of his contract. Ms. Donley explained that Mr. Heatherington had stated that the terms of his resignation would be effective 11:59 p.m. on September 30, 2011. Vice Mayor Denham stated that the Council does have a contract with Mr. Heatherington and it does have a clause which discusses resignation and termination. As far as he understands, Mr. Heatherington is within that contract.

Ms. Holquist asked if Mr. Heatherington is going to be Executive Director until September 30th. Vice Mayor Denham replied that at the moment he is suggesting that Ms. Donley act as the Interim Executive Director until a new Executive Director has been appointed. He has committed to Ms. Donley that he would try to work with the Executive Committee that it would only be to the end of the calendar year.

Ms. Donley stated that she feels that there will be discussion on the issue at the Council's July 21st meeting. Mr. Heatherington is continuing as Executive Director; however, the Council could decide to transfer the responsibilities to someone else. They could also decide to start putting together a Search Committee and parameters.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that both he and Ms. Donley have been working on the Council's new mission statement and also some possibilities of a new direction, following up with key competencies. These are based entirely on the inputs from the last meeting.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that the process which was agreed upon was to first understand what financial budget should look like and begin the groundwork of an organization. The budget which we are shooting for is a savings of \$400,000, which is made up of the \$250,000 DCA shortfall followed by an additional amount which covers the cost of replacing the Executive Director and any search, etc. associated with that. He stated that he estimated approximately \$140,000 additional for that task.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that we need to have an organization framework recommended. Ms. Donley and he have asked the Committee for a couple of more days where they can work on what the organization's framework might look like. He noted that both he and Ms. Donley are not in full agreement at this time, but will work on it and have a recommendation to first present to the Committee for their consideration and then to the Full Council at the July 21st meeting.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that the budget is primarily made up of people and when you are dealing with people it is all very sensitive and a delicate situation. We are trying to treat this with as much as concern as possible about the personal issues as well as to fulfill the budget obligations.

Ms. Holquist asked Vice Mayor Denham if he and Ms. Donley were working on the spreadsheet from the last meeting. Vice Mayor Denham replied yes. He explained that he is taking a very conservative approach and he wants to make sure that there is funding before people are allocated to a project. He stated that approximately \$200,000 more revenue has been added and there is the potential for additional revenue, but it hasn't been secured at this time. The head count for staff, which he is still working on with Ms. Donley, is taking a conservative approach and wants to be a little bit more comfortable with the revenue projections. Then we will come forward with an organization chart which reflects that conservatism and hopefully will satisfy the need for the budget and we will be as careful as we can with personalities and personnel issues.

Commissioner Jones asked if there are going to be any other employee cuts besides Mr. Heatherington. Vice Mayor Denham replied that there will probably be employee cuts. However, it is one of the things that both he and Ms. Donley are discussing, but he doesn't believe that the budget can work without some sort of cuts. He then stated that he is reluctant to name names at this time. He said that he feels that it will be a combination of employee cuts, reduced hours, and indirect expense cuts.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that the second part of the process was to develop a direction for the Council along with the action steps necessary for a new direction. Vice Mayor Denham stated that he feels that the Committee should have some general framework of the discussion over the months of September and October and try to conclude by the beginning of November. It is a complex process that we are going through and so what he is suggesting is to have a framework by the next meeting which will not be complete and will be looking for input from the Full Council on what our mission, new direction and core competencies might be.

Commissioner Turner stated that he feels that Vice Mayor Denham has taken the correct path. He said that he feels that we are at a tipping point where the Council had to take a good look in the mirror and are going to have to shape up some things and also are going to have to get back to our core focus of what the Council stands for. We are essentially shaping the future of what this Council is going to be and justifying this Council's existence.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that it is always better to start off with something on paper rather than a clean sheet because it is easier for people to work with. He explained that these are comments given from Committee members from the last meeting and he is eager to receive more input over the next couple of days.

Mr. Mulhere stated that there are three concerns:

1. The immediate matter of the budget and media's concern of the budget.
2. Little bit more of a long-term matter about the SWFRPC from this point and moving forward.
3. The longer term matter of filling the Executive Director position and the good news is that we don't have to rush into it, because we have someone that is highly capable of performing the duties until a new Executive Director is hired.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he was planning on having a new Executive Director in position by the end of the calendar year. Ms. Holquist stated that is after it is determined what the new direction is and if there is buy in for regional visioning and economic development. The leadership role will be completely different than what it has been in the past.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he feels that Commissioner Turner is the best person to lead this as the Chair. He feels that there needs to be from the Executive Committee a Statement of Intent of the Council. Stating what they feel is missing and what they want done differently. Commissioner Turner stated that he completely agrees and feels that he can deliver that message to the Council.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he feels that the new direction needs to have some meat in it, but we also don't need to tie it down to tightly because he wants input from the other Council members. He would like it to be something that the Committee feels comfortable with going in at the present time, so it will lead the Council to some reasonable conclusions. Ms. Holquist stated that she feels that economic development is going to be a very important issue. She then asked Mr. Mulhere for his thoughts on the issue.

Mr. Mulhere explained that there are a number of ongoing efforts from a regional perspective and there are some existing organizations. He feels that we need to take the time to understand what role the Council could play in advancing regionally economic development efforts. As long as we continue to operate in silos of political subdivisions from an economic development perspective, we are going to continue to have a real challenge on our hands. To a degree we can function more regionally, we are going to operate better. So there is a role there, but we want to be careful to not to try to duplicate or serve what may be ongoing, but have a role that furthers that ongoing effort.

Vice Mayor Denham asked Mr. Mulhere if he felt that economic development became part of the Council's new direction or a separate heading under definition of the role of the Council. Mr. Mulhere replied that he felt that economic development was collaboratively always part of the Council's key role,

but he doesn't believe that it received much focus. It is part of the whole focus of sustainability. Vice Mayor Denham asked Mr. Mulhere to send his comments to Ms. Donley so they can be included in the presentation to the Council.

Ms. Holquist stated that FGCU has tried to create such a regional focus but has been unsuccessful. She then stated that it is already in the Council's mission "strengthen our economy". That is what economic development is. It is not just for new businesses and bringing in new businesses, but it is also for helping existing businesses.

Ms. Holquist asked if the Committee members understood what regional visioning is. Vice Mayor Denham replied that he did because he has done it many times. He then stated that he feels that as the process moves forward he anticipates it being a three month process. He suggested having the Council make a decision on how they want to proceed with the process. Ms. Holquist suggested that at the July 21st Council meeting explain what regional visioning is for those members who never heard the term before and also give the Council a little bit more background on economic development.

Mr. Mulhere noted that the Council just went through the process of creating a strategic plan for the region and there probably is some information in there that could be utilized in moving forward in terms of supporting what the Council's core mission is. There are probably some information that could be utilized in moving forward of supporting the Council's core mission. He feels that there are also policies which advance economic development, mobility, etc.

Ms. Holquist noted that there are several regions within the state that have already completed their visioning efforts and the Collins Center in Tallahassee has supported that effort along with the Century Commission.

Ms. Donley asked if it would be helpful if staff took the new SRPP and matched it up with what is being proposed for the new direction and the key competencies, so that there is a comparison of where things match up and where there may be a need for additional work. Ms. Holquist suggested waiting on doing that until we see where the new direction is going and it may become part of the work in August or September. Mr. Mulhere stated that he agrees.

Commissioner Turner stated that we need to hold people back on making this a bigger goal than what it is.

Ms. Holquist stated that she felt that the biggest issue at the July 21st Council meeting is going to be the Executive Director position. Commissioner Turner stated that he agrees; however, with Mr. Heatherington basically deciding that he is going to resign, the sticking point is going to be whether or not the Council will still want him around the office or not. He feels that in the manner, in which that Mr. Heatherington has chosen to step down, he feels that the Council is going to say that they can continue operations with him continuing with what he is doing and we can continue our search. So Mr. Heatherington can continue to be in the office because it is not going to impede progress.

Ms. Holquist stated that she feels that the Council will need a recommendation from someone who has discussed the issue with staff and get a feeling for how it all plays out. She then said to Commissioner Turner that he should be the one to make that recommendation.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he feels that it is in the best interest of everyone that Mr. Heatherington leaves the office and is paid out until the end of his contract.

Ms. Holquist stated that she agrees with Vice Mayor Denham. She feels that it creates less of a conflict. She then suggested that the Committee make a recommendation to that affect.

Mr. Mulhere stated that he perceived that there was a lot of hostility and conflict as the result of the actions that occurred, which is probably not repairable. Once a resignation is tendered he feels that it is in everyone's best interest to move on and it is also in Mr. Heatherington's best interest.

Commissioner Turner stated that will be the recommendation which will come from the Executive Committee.

Ms. Holquist stated that she feels that the next question is going to be about the Interim Executive Director. There have been conversations about people throwing out names and she feels that it is a terrible time to bring in someone from the outside in.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that it is his recommendation which he had made earlier to ask Ms. Donley to become acting Executive Director until the end of the calendar year.

Commissioner Turner stated that actually it should be until a new Executive Director is hired.

Commissioner Butch Jones stated that he agrees with Mr. Heatherington stepping down from his position and leaving the office because he feels if Mr. Heatherington stays in the office it will create more problems. He then stated that when Mr. Heatherington was hired, he was hired within. He then asked if there is someone who is capable and competent enough to fill the Executive Director position without going out and doing a search.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he feels that is a good point and he has thought about it and feels that it is a discussion point for the Executive Committee and it should be a discussion point over the next month or so.

Ms. Holquist asked Vice Mayor Denham if that should wait until the Council's new direction is determined. Vice Mayor Denham stated that he agrees that some of the groundwork does need to be completed in order to be sure that the new Executive Director believes in the Council's direction that the Council is moving in.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he doesn't believe that the Council needs to rush into hiring a new Executive Director, because he feels that the Council will have a very competent Interim Executive Director.

Ms. Holquist stated that we also don't know what the key competencies are at the current time or possibly even the next month. Commissioner Turner stated that he agrees and he feels that it is going to be a very lengthy, good, and healthy discussion. Commissioner Butch Jones said that he feels that the Committee will be able to agree on that.

Commissioner Turner stated that he will not be available through July 25-29.

Councilwoman Heitmann thanked everyone for their efforts and she will submit her comments to Ms. Donley.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

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