

**Minutes of  
SWFRPC Legislative Affairs Committee Meeting  
November 29, 2011 @ 1:00 pm**

Members Attended

Commissioner Jim Coletta, Collier County BOCC (Co-Chair)  
Councilwoman Teresa Heitmann, City of Naples  
Vice Mayor Mick Denham, City of Sanibel

Guests

Councilman Forrest Banks, City of Fort Myers  
Commissioner Donna Fiala, Collier County BOCC

Staff

Liz Donley, Interim Executive Director  
Nichole Gwinnett, Administrative Specialist II

**Item #1 – Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1:08 p.m.

**Item #2 – 2012 SWFRPC's Legislative Priorities**

Ms. Donley noted that she had the City of Sanibel's local and regional goals, along with the legislative priorities which were included in the Lee County Legislative Delegation packet. This included Lee County, City of Fort Myers, City of Cape Coral, etc. She then asked Councilwoman Heitmann if the City of Naples legislative priorities were posted online, if so she could pull out the common factors and then based on the conversations of the Council members; put together some suggested bullets for a one page 2012 Legislative Priorities.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that it is his experience working with the legislators to have a small number of key priorities rather than having a long list. He then suggested limiting the Council's priorities to no more than four, because it gets very confusing.

Councilwoman Heitmann stated that she agrees.

Ms. Donley briefly reviewed the Council's 2011 key legislative priorities.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that with the exception of the fourth priority, he would stay with the current list. He said that with the fourth priority, since the DCA situation has changed it doesn't make sense to keep it as it is currently written. Councilwoman Heitmann stated that she agrees. Vice Mayor Denham suggested rewriting the fourth priority to state "Support the funding for Regional Planning Councils."

Vice Mayor Denham stated that the 2011 Legislative Priorities are very close to the Florida League of Cities initiatives. Their top priority was a comprehensive renewable energy plan. They didn't have the Everglades issue listed, but they did include the pre-emption of the water rules.

Ms. Donley noted that in regards to funding for the regional planning councils, there is no funding in the budget for regional planning councils that is coming out of DEO to the legislature at this time.

Councilman Banks asked if there was any funding last year for regional planning councils. Ms. Donley explained that there was funding placed in the budget but the Governor vetoed it.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that it is clear that there won't be any funding, but maybe there should be statement that they should support regional planning councils and the fundamental mission of regional planning councils.

Councilwoman Heitmann asked why we would eliminate the financial support. Vice Mayor Denham explained that he doesn't feel that there is going to be any financial support for the regional planning councils. He is concerned with asking for something that you know that you will not receive.

Councilman Banks asked if the legislature will pay attention to the third priority, which deals with the Everglades Restoration. Ms. Donley explained that there has been a new coalition which has formed by elected officials for support of the Everglades Restoration. Councilman Banks stated that he would rather strengthen the "stay alive" priority and give up on the Everglades restoration priority because it is going to be taken care of anyways. The people that might find the RPCs some support probably are not that excited about the Everglades restoration at this point in time.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that before anything is taken off of the list, he asked if there is anything that should be added to the list.

Ms. Donley noted that the one issue that she had heard from both the City of North Port and Hendry County when staff visited with them was the need for regional transportation planning, something bigger than the MPOs.

Vice Mayor Denham asked if there is an issue that would help the rural counties. Ms. Donley replied that there is the State Comprehensive Renewable Action Plan, which would support the inland counties and the other one would be under the third priority which specifically calls out agriculture. Vice Mayor Denham stated that anything that we can put in the priorities to support the inland counties he feels we should do.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that even if the Everglades Restoration item is not a top priority this year, may be it should be reworded this year so that we do provide some support for the economic development of the inland counties.

Ms. Donley suggested rewording the second priority to support the natural resource conservation programs, because of the interface with economic development and the economics that are linked to having these natural resources available for tourism . . .

Vice Mayor Denham stated that one of the big issues relative to the Everglades is to find a flow way south. This is one of the big issues for the coastal counties. Is there a need to put that thought process in there? One of the ways to help to get the water to flow south was to raise Alligator Alley.

Councilman Banks stated that the legislature is currently looking at cutting the budget, economic development and jobs. He then said that he doesn't mind giving the legislature one good

environmental priority. Vice Mayor Denham stated that he would agree to take the Everglades Restoration out because he feels that the issue is much bigger than the Council, so he wouldn't oppose taking it out. Councilman Banks stated that he feels that the fourth priority which deals with the RPC's existence and well being and put something in there about economic development, because he feels that it would get the legislature's attention.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that within the Council's visioning process there is language within the process where the Council is trying to promote economic growth within the six counties. He suggested using the Council's visioning process to indicate why the legislature should put funding back into the regional planning councils. Councilman Banks agreed.

Councilwoman Heitmann stated that she also agreed.

Vice Mayor Denham suggested to keep the first priority as is; the second priority would be the economic development tied to regional planning councils; third priority would be oppose unfunded mandates and pre-emption local authorities, etc. . . ; and he is not too sure if there is a need for a fourth priority.

Councilman Banks agreed with Vice Mayor Denham's suggested priorities.

Commissioner Coletta stated that he agrees with Vice Mayor Denham and it needs to be kept short and simple.

Councilwoman Heitmann stated that she also supports those three priorities.

Commissioner Fiala stated that she supports the three priorities. She then stated that the focus needs to be more on economic development because she feels that is the way that the Council should be following to bring the Council back to economic vitality. Vice Mayor Denham explained that economic development is tied into the Council's future vision, indicating that the Council's vision is to promote economic development within the Southwest Florida Region. Commissioner Fiala asked Vice Mayor Denham if he felt that it will somehow tie in with the Council leading the region forward to economic development. Vice Mayor Denham replied yes.

Commissioner Coletta stated that economic development can be accomplished in several ways. One way is to have our rules and regulations more user friendly. Maybe this could be one of the Council's directions because it is attainable. He doesn't feel raising money is going to be the big thing where we need to be. Trying to remove all of the obstacles to try to keep businesses locating in Southwest Florida will probably go a long ways where we can play a role.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that if we use words such as "streamlining regulations," which is what the issues of being in the past and the objections to the Council. If we can focus economic development through streamlining regulations and tie that to the functions of the regional planning councils and move forward. There lies a scenario that may be sellable.

Commissioner Coletta suggested recommending to the Council to hold a workshop on this issue, either at a meeting or at a special meeting in order to come up with ideas from staff and the various jurisdictions on how we can make our rules and regulations fit the model of direction to help businesses locate here and grow.

Vice Mayor Denham stated that he has heard that there is going to be pressure on the DRI process this session. He was going to suggest to the Council that we need to rethink the DRI process because it

was coming under some challenges due to the regulations issue. The DRIs, regulations and the way we do things is going to change anyways.

Commissioner Coletta stated that he agrees with Vice Mayor Denham. When it comes to DRI process, we don't have to have it as complicated or demanding as it is. The process has grown over the years and has become a cumbersome tool that we are using. He feels that we need to look at the original DRI process and come up with a basic tool.

**Item #3 – Other Business**

No other business was discussed at this time.

**Item #4 - Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

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