



JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

TRUE COMMISSION LEGISLATIVE TRACKING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES December 15, 2008 3:00 p.m.

City Council Conference Room B
Suite 425, City Hall
117 W. Duval Street

Attendance: Pam Korn (Chair), Committee Members John Palombi, Wes Benwick and Joe Andrews

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chairman Greg Anderson.

Chairwoman Korn introduced the committee's task – how to review the mass of new legislative introductions into City Council every two weeks and determine which bills may be of interest to the TRUE Commission for further study and/or comment. The group quickly agreed that limiting searches of the Council's Legislative Bill Search system to the word "appropriation" would not identify a number of other types of legislative action that may have fiscal ramifications or otherwise be of interest (i.e. approval of contracts, amendments to employee pension or other benefit rights etc.). The committee discussed the possible utility of the Council requiring that fiscal impact statements be prepared and submitted with the introduction of any legislation that may have fiscal consequences, as is required in the Florida Legislature. The difficulty in knowing when some types of actions may have fiscal consequences, and of quantifying those consequences in advance, was discussed.

The committee determined that the volume of legislation introduced in the City Council every two weeks will make it difficult, if not impossible, for a few citizen volunteers to give anything more than a cursory review of the vast majority of the bills each cycle. What is needed is a mechanism for quickly scanning the bill titles and picking out those of potential interest for further investigation. Commissioner Andrews printed out the last Council cycle's new introductions (4 pages) and found approximately 6-8 bills of interest solely by reading the bill titles. The group felt that with a bit of practice it should be relatively easy to recognize the normal, everyday legislative items needed to keep the wheels of government turning and to recognize those items that might be out of the ordinary, enact new policy, make a substantial financial commitment, or otherwise of interest to the commission.

The committee discussed the legislative cycle and the timing of its reviews. Staff member Jeff Clements explained that the deadline for submitting legislation to the Council's Legislative Services Division for first reading introduction on a Council agenda is 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday preceding a Council meeting. The titles of all bills submitted by the deadline are entered into the Legislative Bill Search system and should be available via the City web site by the Friday afternoon before a Council meeting. After the bills are introduced at a Tuesday night Council meeting, the Council Research Division produces bill summaries of many of the bills (excluding certain types of bills such as honoring and commending resolutions, rezonings, land use changes and other quasi-judicial actions), and those summaries are posted in PDF format to the City Council web page on the Thursday afternoon following the Tuesday meeting. The text of the bills is available electronically through the Legislative Bill Search

web page, and related documentation such as the Legislative Fact Sheet produced by the administration for bills it introduces, exhibits, budget transfer documentation, etc. are scanned and electronically attached to the bill file.

The committee recognizes that timing will always be an issue and that the TRUE Commission may be hard pressed to identify bills of interest, gather background information on the proposal, talk to the appropriate City agency or department to understand the rationale for the action, convey that information to the full commission, take action as a collective body, and transmit that action to the appropriate parties (Mayor and City Council) within the confines of the typical 5 week, 3 reading Council legislative cycle. If an item is considered important enough that the commission definitely wants to make its feelings known before final action is taken, and emergency called meeting may be necessary to meet the deadline. Commissioner Palombi cautioned against raising alarms about numerous small items and recommended that the commission save its power to comment and make recommendations for items that are truly worthwhile and meaningful in the overall scope of the City's activities and budget.

The committee decided to try out a review methodology for a couple of months to get a feel for how well it meets their expectations. Committee members will use the Legislative Bill Search system to access and review the titles of the new bills being introduced early in Council meeting weeks to begin looking for items of interest. By the Thursday afternoon after the Council meeting the Council Research Division's bill summaries will be available for review on the Council web site. The committee will meet on the Friday morning after Council meetings (2nd and 4th Fridays of each month) to review the new bills and bill summaries, ask staff for additional information (attachments, exhibits, contracts, etc.) and determine if there are items that merit further investigation. A committee member will be assigned to make further investigations of any bills of interest and the committee will determine at its next meeting two weeks later if the item merits a report to the full commission and a request for some action or official comment. Testing the procedure for two or three months should indicate to the committee whether it is producing a useful outcome and how much time and effort it is taking.

When the committee finished its discussion of the new legislative tracking procedure, Commission Chairman Palombi distributed copies of a draft document he had prepared after the previous week's meeting of the Long Term Fiscal Health Committee that identified a number of potential focus areas for the committee to direct its work. Mr. Palombi will e-mail the document to staff for circulation to all the commissioners for discussion at the next full TRUE Commission meeting. He noted that members of the Long Term Fiscal Health Committee had volunteered to begin doing some initial investigation into several of the issue areas and hoped that other commissioners would be willing to join the committee and volunteer to pick additional issues for initial investigation. The hope is that the committee members will produce enough information to help the committee determine where it can best focus its time and resources to examine issues that will of the greatest importance and greatest fiscal impact to the City's fiscal future. The committee will need to devote its time and attention to just 2 or 3 of the many possible issues if it hopes to do enough in-depth work to have something valid to say before the end of the Commission's year in June and the beginning of the City Council's budget deliberations in July.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

Jeff Clements, Chief
Council Research Division
630-1405

Posted 12.16.08
11:45 p.m.