



Taxation, Revenue, and Utilization of Expenditures (TRUE) Commission

Tony Bates, Chair

Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2004
4:00 p.m.

Attendance: Tony Bates (Chair), Marcella Lowe, Charles Curley, John Palombi, Tom Crabtree, Amy Holliman, Elaine Burnett, Lee Martin, Dick Berry, Lou Myers, Mark Roesser, Louvenia Tippins

Excused: Randall Deen, Larry Jaffe, Don Wolfson, Bruce Glassman

Guests: Richard Wallace and Pam Markham - Council Auditor's office

The meeting convened at 4:03 p.m.

Minutes

The minutes of the April 20, 2004 meeting were previously distributed. Commissioner Martin requested that he be added to the list of commissioners in attendance.

.. The minutes were approved as amended.

Derek Igou, Chief of Property Safety

Mr. Igou made a presentation on the City's response to the Wollitz Gardens Apartments emergency evacuation. He explained that the Property Safety Division is the primary agency to enforce the Property Safety Code in Chapter 518 and the only agency authorized to enforce emergency orders to vacate premises (except for the Fire Marshall in certain circumstances). Many agencies are involved in code enforcement issues, including the Property Safety Division, Health Department, Building Inspection Division, Zoning Inspection Division, and the Fire Marshall. Cooperation among the agencies has gotten much better since the Wollitz Gardens incident, but there will inevitably continue to be emergency evacuation incidents because of the very substandard housing conditions that continue to be discovered. Mr. Igou stated that the Ordinance Code and regulations do not provide for an official coordinator of multi-agency response, but he acts informally in that capacity by mutual agreement of the affected agencies. He works with the Community Services Department to help mitigate the effects of emergency evacuations on the displaced residents.

Mr. Igou explained his division's responses to the Council Auditor's audit of Property Safety as follows: 1) the clerical supervisor position was filled, as recommended; 2) as of April 1, 2004 a rotation system was implemented for both inspectors and supervisors; 3) employee morale has improved significantly in recent months; 4) every employee is offered a variety of training opportunities, both in-house through the City's training division and outside through the Florida Association of Code Enforcement. Better in-house training is taking place on internal policies and procedures to improve uniformity of interpretation of City policy and regulations; 5) the computer system is still a big challenge and needs updating. The Information Technology Division is starting to do programming improvements, but significant dollars (\$500-600,000 requested in the upcoming budget) still need to be appropriated for hardware purchases. The division made the decision to phase out use of laptop computers by inspectors in the field and gone to using PDAs, which they've found to be more efficient and effective; 6) overtime use has been cut back dramatically through better scheduling practices and efficiency improvements. Four-day work weeks and Sunday inspections have been discontinued.

In response to various questions from commissioners, Mr. Igou stated: that his division uses an internal performance measurement system; that his division has the authority to inspect and cite any building for code compliance, including city-owned buildings, but they do not do so on a regular basis unless alerted to a potential problem; and that there is no mandate for all buildings in the city to be regularly inspected. He noted that inspectors are limited in what they can do on private property by the owner's Fourth Amendment right to privacy, without a court order. Only Property Safety and the Fire Marshall have the power to issue an order to vacate, although other agencies can take actions which in turn trigger an order to vacate (i.e. if JEA cuts off the power to a building, thus making it uninhabitable).

The commission expressed its appreciation for the operational improvements made thus far and the positive response to the audit's recommendations.

Committee Chairs' Reports

Audit #541 – Jacksonville Children's Commission: the item was deferred to the next meeting.

Audit #585 – Shands Jacksonville Indigent Care: the item was deferred to the next meeting.

CityLink Committee – action on this item was deferred for 6 months.

Policies and Procedures Committee – Commissioner Martin reported that the committee will hold its final meeting on Friday, June 25th at 9:30 a.m. and will report thereafter.

Audit #583 – Property Appraiser's Office Audit – Commissioner Burnett reported that the committee met last week with Property Appraiser Jim Overton to discuss the audit. He admitted that the office has been unsuccessful in meeting the state mandate that all property be physically inspected and reappraised every 3 years, but that is a common failure among all Florida counties. He is in the process of hiring additional staff and is buying equipment to improve the process over the next 12-18 months. He feels his staff needs additional training. He noted that property that receives the "greenbelt" exemption is actually checked by a forester on staff to determine that legitimate silvacultural use is taking place.

Mr. Overton agreed to report back to the commission on the potential effect of adding an additional \$25,000 homestead exemption.

Cash Management Committee – Commissioner Lowe stated that the committee would postpone further work until the Policies and Procedures Committee had completed its work and reported.

First Coast No More Homeless Pets – a new animal control ordinance sponsored by Councilman Jerry Holland is now pending before City Council that will incorporate the Audit Committee's recommendations from the audit. Commissioner Lowe will follow up on this ordinance and report at the June meeting.

Audit #580 – First Coast Black Business Investment Corporation – Chairman Bates read a letter he proposed to send to the Jacksonville Economic Development Commission requesting further information about a number of items discussed at the April commission meeting. He also distributed a matrix produced by the Chamber of Commerce showing the range of assistance programs for small businesses available in Jacksonville. He also distributed copies of the memo written by Audit Committee Chairwoman Faye Rustin explaining the rationale for the Audit Committee concluding its review of the audit and agreeing to the release of the escrowed Public Service Grant to First Coast BBIC.

Commissioner Palombi moved (2nd Lowe) to send the proposed letter to JEDC executive director Kirk Wendland with copies to Audit Committee Chair Faye Rustin, JEDC chairman Ceree Harden and Council President Lad Daniels

♦ The motion was approved.

Audit #589 – JEA Pipe Bursting Contract – item deferred.

Audit #591 – Additional Court Costs – no action needed.

Auditor's Report – Council Auditor Richard Wallace distributed copies of the City's annual audit management letter and Consolidated Annual Financial Report (CAFR) performed by Ernst and Young. He briefly described trends in the General Fund balance, financial condition ratios, total revenue per citizen and total operating expenditures per citizen. The disparity between expenditures growing faster than revenues is in large part an artifact of the Better Jacksonville Plan capital expenditures.

In response to a question from Commissioner Roesser about the feasibility of requiring bidders on City contracts to guarantee their prices at the time of bid and put the onus on them to lock in the price of materials from their suppliers, Mr. Wallace replied that very large projects (such as the new county courthouse) are not amenable to that process – there are far too many uncertainties at the bidding stage that aren't clarified until well into the design process, so the likely response of bidders would be to inflate their bids to hedge against this uncertainty. By consensus, Commissioner Roesser was authorized to meet with the Procurement Department and look at the Purchasing Code to see how the bidding process works.

Chairman's Report – Chairman Bates reported that he wants to take an organized look at the specific powers and duties of the commission outlined in Chapter 57 and how the commission can best meet its responsibilities. Commissioners Berry and Palombi volunteered to start with a review of Section 57.105(a). Mr. Bates asked for volunteers to take up the remaining paragraphs of the Powers and Duties section.

Commissioner comments

Commissioner Burnett noted that she had reported on the TRUE Commission's activities at the last meeting of the Northwest CPAC.

Commissioner Martin reported that the Better Jacksonville Plan is currently only \$21 million over budget on the \$2.2 billion plan.

Nominating Committee

Commissioner Lowe reported that the Nominating Committee consists of commissioners Lowe, Myers and Martin, who are seeking nominees for office for next year. The committee will meet before the June commission meeting to finalize a slate for presentation.

Next meeting

The commission's next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 15th at 4:00 p.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18 p.m.

Items pending further follow-up

Children's Commission audit – Commissioner Wolfson
Government in the Sunshine Law briefing – Chairman Bates
Performance Measurement Committee – Commissioners Glassman and Deen
First Coast Black Business Investment Corporation letter to JEDC – Chairman Bates
Policy and Procedure Committee – Commissioner Martin
Shands Jacksonville Indigent Care audit – Commissioner Wolfson
Property Appraiser's Office audit – Commissioner Burnett
First Coast No More Homeless Pets – Spay/Neuter Jax audit – Commissioner Lowe
City Emergency Eviction Procedures – Commissioner Burnett
Nominating Committee – Commissioner Lowe