



**COJ Journey Forward  
Board Meeting Minutes  
June 5, 2025**

**1. Welcome and Opening Chairman Remarks**

W.C. Gentry, Board Chair

Chairman Gentry officially commenced the meeting at 3:00 p.m., emphasizing that a significant item on the agenda is the proposed budget for the upcoming year, which will be submitted to the city. He also took a moment to introduce the newest member of the Board, Mr. Bernie de la Rionda, a distinguished Prosecutor with 35 years of experience.

Members Present: Betty Burney, Bernie de la Rionda, W.C. Gentry, Octavius Holliday, Walter Piatt, Hilbert McDougal, Jr., Dr. Tes Tuason, Stephen Zona

Also Present: Carla Miller, Mayor's Office, Daryl Joseph and Daniel Piastuck from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services

Members Absent: James Ellout; LTG (ret.) Walter Piatt; and Lawrence Schmitt

**2. Review/Approval of Minutes**

W.C. Gentry, Board Chair

Chairman Gentry asked if there were any changes to the minutes for the April and May meetings. There being none, the minutes were approved.

**3. Parks and Recreation Presentation**

Daniel Piastuck, Chief of Recreation Community Programming  
LaDora Taylor, Parks District Manager

Mr. Piastuck presented a comprehensive overview of the Parks and Recreation department, which encompasses 400 parks throughout the city. Among these, there are 34 swimming pools, 43 community centers, and 6 gymnasiums available for summer activities. As summer approaches, Mr. Piastuck and his team are preparing for a summer camp which will take place at 11 different

locations. Camps will feature educational field trips, recreational games, hands-on activities, a basketball league, and specialized athletic camp.

The Summer Night Lights program caters to individuals aged 13 to 18, ensuring safety through the presence of private security firms and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO). Recruitment of teens occurs via social media platforms and collaborations with organizations such as the Police Athletic League and Boys & Girls Clubs. To enhance pool safety, over 400 lifeguards have been employed across 14 locations offering swimming lessons. The cost of summer camp is determined using the federal poverty level, and additional funding is provided by Kids Hope Alliance.

Following a thorough discussion, it was agreed that Mr. Piastuck would supply the Board with details regarding the number of summer camp participants, camp locations and program offerings.

#### **4. Budget Overview**

Carla Miller, Special Advisor to the Mayor

Mrs. Miller presented the budget overview. Once this budget is passed, an official budget request will be prepared for the Chair's signature, which will then be submitted to the Mayor's office.

The Mayor's office is tasked with managing a substantial budget of nearly \$2 billion, and throughout June and July, they will be working on fund allocations for each department. Proposed budgets will undergo scrutiny during public meetings of the Mayor's Budget Review Committee. During these meetings, discussions led by Mr. Griggs and Chairman Gentry will address various aspects of the Journey Forward budget, ultimately leading to the committee's recommendations. During the month of August, the City Council Finance Committee will review the request and the final budget is approved the last Tuesday in September.

While there is a possibility that budget recommendations may be fully approved, it is more likely that adjustments will be necessary, especially in light of budget constraints that require all departments to implement cuts. Last, Ms. Miller encouraged Board members to attend committee meetings to support their budget recommendations.

#### **5. 2025-2026 JF Budget Review**

W.C. Gentry, Board Chair

Mr. Gentry began the review by stating that two Finance committee meetings were held to discuss the proposals outlined in the budget. The initial Board meetings aimed to familiarize everyone with key areas identified by the Transition committee, which serve as budget priorities. Within these areas, we have highlighted specific programs that have demonstrated success and are essential for fulfilling our commitment to both intervene in and prevent crime, as well as to address the underlying factors contributing to it.

The budget represents our request to the city for the necessary funding to tackle these issues in the coming year. While some items may be directly funded due to exceptions in the statutes, most will require us to manage the funding under our oversight, establishing clear expectations, goals, and metrics for assessment. A pertinent point raised during our discussions was the need to evaluate the Parks Department more closely to determine its impact. While it is beneficial for children to engage in healthy activities, it is equally important to assess how these programs influence student's behavior and school attendance. We are committed to developing a framework that will provide data to evaluate the effectiveness of our initiatives.

Mrs. Betty Burney expressed her support of the budget but indicated that she would like to obtain Superintendent Bernier's insight to determine if this funding would be Dr. Bernier's choice. Chairman Gentry agreed that it would be beneficial for Mr. Bernier to appear before the Board soon. He continued by discussing additional budget priorities which include juvenile assessments, decreasing truancy, second chance training/employment, criminal justice engagement and administrative support. Chairman Gentry asked for a motion to approve the budget.

Motion: Bernie de la Rionda

Second: Stephen Zona

Approved: 7-1

He then asked for a motion to approve his submission of the budget document to the city.

Motion: Betty Burney

Second: Hilbert McDougal, Jr.

Approved: 8-0

Mr. de la Rionda expressed his endorsement of the proposed budget while emphasizing the need for future budget discussions to prioritize support for victims and victim advocacy groups. He highlighted the issue of recurring victimization, particularly among family members who may themselves become entangled in criminal activities. Chairman Gentry advised Mr. de la Rionda to reach out to Mr. Griggs to obtain a list of victim advocacy groups.

Mr. Zona raised questions regarding the repercussions for students who face suspension, prompting Chairman Gentry to advise Board members to compile their inquiries for the Superintendent and send them to Mr. Griggs. Additionally, he encouraged Board members to provide Mr. Griggs with a list of topics they wish to explore further.

## **6. Public Comment**

Chairman Gentry asked if there were any public comments and there were none.

## **7. Adjourn**

The next meeting is scheduled for July 17<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.