BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA
WORKSHOP
Tallahassee-Leon County
Economic Development
April 21, 2009
1:00 p.m.

The Board of County Commissioners met for a Workshop on the Tallahassee-Leon County Economic Development Council (EDC) in the Commission Chambers on Tuesday, April 21, 2009.

Present were: Chairman Bryan Desloge and Commissioners Rackleff, Sauls, Thaell, Akinyemi and Dailey; Commissioner Proctor absent. Also present were County Administrator Parwez Alam, County Attorney Herb Thiele, and Board Secretary Rebecca Vause.

Chairman Desloge called the Workshop to order at 1:00 p.m.

Vince Long, Deputy County Administrator, introduced Lee Daniel, recently appointed Tourist Development Council (TDC) Executive Director; other workshop participants included:

- Beth Kirkland, Executive Director, EDC
- Kim Williams, Chairman Elect, EDC
- Jay Townsend, Assistant City Manager, Safety & Neighborhood Services

Chairman Desloge stated that he wanted discussions to include the TDC's role in the economic development process.

Chairman Desloge turned the meeting over to Ms. Kirkland who reviewed the agenda and provided a power point presentation. Ms. Kirkland noted that included in the Board's workshop packet was copy of the EDC's FY 2008-09 Mid-year Progress Report, which would guide a great deal of the discussion.

Ms. Kirkland's presentation included:

- EDC Organizational Structure
- Public/Private Economic Development Organizations (EDO's)
- First Focus on Local Business
  - Regional and State Partners
  - Targeted Sector
  - Industry-Led Business Development (roundtables)
  - Synchronist Business Information System (methodology and database tool for engaging existing businesses within a community to profile)
  - E-Synchronist Visits

Commissioner Rackleff referenced the questionnaire used for on-site visits of existing companies and inquired if this information was collected from outside companies that wanted to relocate and obtain subsidies. Ms. Kirkland responded that a General Project Overview is received on potential businesses and only basic information such as sector, job creation, average annual wage, etc. is received. Commissioner Rackleff opined that the County has an obligation to review the financial viability of potential businesses, especially when tax payer money is being used to subsidize the company.

- Travis Yelverton, EDC Director, Existing Industry Development, presented information extracted from the 75 E-Synchronist visits he conducted. The presentation included product analysis, expansion plans, etc.

Commissioner Rackleff confirmed the numbers provided represented data from local companies and was obtained from July 07 – April 08. He expressed concern over the timeliness of the information, as it was over a year old.

There was a lengthy discussion on method of data collection, its relevancy and the usefulness of the data.

The remainder of the workshop was dedicated to a sharing of ideas on economic development:

Commissioner Thaell stressed the necessity of putting in place a structure and process to strengthen the local economy and assist individuals in securing and maintaining employment.

Mr. Williams agreed that there is urgency in the community and stated that efforts such as a loosening of policies to initiate development and the funding of projects either through a loan program or stimulus dollars was needed to encourage growth. He added that there was a continued need to look for industries in the targeted industry groups the EDC is working with and to work with successful local companies to put people to work.

Chairman Desloge noted a need to 1) focus on what could be done differently to put people to work and 2) ensure that the infrastructure is in place to help accelerate growth.

Commissioner Akinyemi suggested that the EDC do more to ensure that small businesses know the opportunities and assistance that is available to them through the EDC. He added that the "human talent at FSU and FAMU" and the physical resources offered at Innovation Park are not being maximized to their fullest potential.

Commissioner Rackleff expressed concerns regarding the subsidizing of potential businesses. These concerns included the lack of transparency, accountability and financial information of the proposed projects and the need for better follow-up of failed businesses. He stated that he wanted more due diligence from the EDC to better understand the risk and benefits of business propositions.

Mr. Alam asserted that it is not only buildings and financial incentives that attract potential businesses to the area, but also the quality of life that the community provides, i.e., e schools, roads, parks, police/fire/EMS, etc.

Commissioner Thaell requested information on the number of corporate relocations and the incentives that were provided in the relocation. Ms. Kirkland stated that this information could be obtained and provided.

Ms. Kirkland proposed a discussion between the City, County and EDC on the development of templates for retention and project development, which included the identification of local resources (tax increment financing, micro loans through utilities, etc).

Mr. Alam recommended that the Knight Foundation Report be obtained and reread as it contains an enormous amount of information pertaining to topics being shared and discussed.

Commissioner Rackleff indicated that he wanted the Commission to act as a business and stated that he wanted to have confidence that the EDC has thoroughly evaluated business opportunities, recognize the risks and payoffs, and understand the markets that they are operating in and where it fits into the global economy.

Commissioner Rackleff moved to direct staff to conduct a thorough management review of the Economic Development Council to include future steps to be taken. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Commissioner Thaell offered that an official management review was not needed, however, concurred that a greater sense of confidence was needed when a project is brought before the Board for consideration. He remarked that he would like for the EDC to work with the County (and himself) on addressing the current unemployment crisis.

Chairman Desloge stated that time was running short and he wanted to give participants an opportunity to make comment and to provide direction.

- Commissioner Dailey commented that he wanted to identify the role of the new TDC Director in the process. He voiced his hesitancy in discussing any type of business development in the current state of the economy and opined that not enough was being done to assist local businesses to succeed. He inquired if cross-tabulations had been done between the types of businesses the EDC is recruiting vs. the types of local jobs being lost and are attempts being made to find replacements for jobs or trying to attract new businesses to relocate. Ms. Kirkland responded that the EDC is working closely with WorkForce Plus on job placement and coordination. Commissioner Dailey asserted that further discussion was needed on the role of local government.

- Commissioner Sauls voiced interest in the identification of alternative incentives.

- Commissioner Rackleff conveyed that he would continue to work on improving the quality of life within the community and spending tax payer dollars prudently. He concurred that methods other than cash needed to be identified as incentives.

- Commissioner Akinyemi asked for a summary on what has been working and could be done differently, how the TDC and EDC envision it will work together and Mr. Daniel's role in that process.

- Chairman Desloge stressed quality of life and suggested that vacant local buildings, such as the Tallahassee Mall, be evaluated for some type of possible public/private partnership.

- Jay Townsend, Assistant City Manager, stated that the issues discussed were "community development items" and the City is looking at everything from infrastructure, transportation (rail, interstate, and airport), quality of life, attitude and culture and finances.

- Commissioner Thaell emphasized the need to continue to look for solutions to the current job crisis.

The Workshop adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA

ATTEST:

BY: _____
Bryan Desloge, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners

BY: _____
Bob Inzer, Clerk of the Court
Leon County, Florida