

St. Johns County Roundtable Minutes 7-14-08

Attendance: 25

Press: John Woodward, SJC Recorder
Christina Abel, Shorelines

Guests: Commissioner Ben Rich
Assistant County Administrator Jerry Cameron
Commission candidate Ken Bryan
Executive Director Economic Development Council Nick Sacia
Business Development Specialist US SBA John Doriety

May minutes: approved as submitted

Treasurer's report: \$2, 487.82 (representing 13 paid of 43 active members)

Committee Reports:

Education - Jim McLane's report attached as submitted.

Growth - Marcy Silkebacken. Marcy reported that the EAR comments are back from the State and are under analysis at the County. She went on to report that Roger VanGhent did a great job presenting the Charter to a recent democratic party meeting and that his written analysis was available for wider distribution. WR agreed to distribute it to the Roundtable membership. RVG will send it in PDF form to May Management for this distribution.

Government and budget - Walt Rohrer. The '09 budget calls for expenses of \$536 million plus capital carry-forward of \$136 million totaling \$672 million. This compares to \$707 million in fiscal '08. This represents a 5% reduction of \$35 million from '08 which was also down by roughly 5% from '07. These reductions compare to an average increase of 40% per year since 2000. The last 2 years represent a very impressive return to reason and are the product of a lot of work by Doug Timms and his OMB staff and improved discipline on the part of the Board of County Commissioners. The administration is overseeing a reorganization of government from 40 departments to 14 that should better serve the future. Considering the County had corrective OPED funding and a reduction in ad valorem property tax revenues as well as substantial reductions in impact and processing fees, this result is very impressive.

FEATURED SUBJECTS - SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

There were 2 speakers, John Doriety, business development specialist with the US Small Business Administration, and Nick Sacia, Executive Director of the Economic Development Council of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

John Doriety stated that the SBA was formed in 1953 to help develop small business to start, grow and succeed. Small business represents approximately half of our gross national product and is growing at a considerably faster rate. The SBA helps in 3 essential ways:

- 1) They provide a training network that includes on-line courses, library and research material, and perhaps most importantly access to business counselors through the SCORE program (Senior Core of Retired Executive). These experienced business leaders are available for direct consultation for the small business operators.
- 2) SBA loan guarantee programs. These programs can create federal guarantees of 75% to 85% on up to \$2 million. Other sub-loan categories relate to Veterans under the Patriot Express program. Other specialties include financing for international trade, export working capital and the like.
- 3) Help in applying for government contracts. The government is the largest single contractor and the SBA through its programs works to qualify small business operators for their share of the pie. The set-asides for small business now amount to nearly 25% of the \$800 billion contracted annually. The sub-contracting assistance program promotes maximum use of small businesses by the nation's prime contractor.

The Certificate of Competency program allows small business to appeal a decision that it is unable to fulfill the requirements of a specific government contract.

The SBA works with the General Services Administration and the Department of Defense to provide a database of vendors, including small business. Prime contractors use SUB-NET to post sub-contracting opportunities. Small businesses can review this website to identify opportunities in their areas of expertise.

The Historically Under Utilized Business Zone Program stimulates economic development and creates job in urban and rural communities by providing contracting assistance to small businesses. The HUBZONE program establishes preferences for award of federal contracts to small businesses located in historically under utilized business zones.

Nick Sacia followed stating that the economic development arm of the Chamber of Commerce basic purpose was to improve the strength of the County and the quality of life here. This goal is achieved by attracting high wage primary industries that raise the level of pay in the County.

This is accomplished by direct contact and working through regional counterparts such as the multi-county Cornerstone operation based in Jacksonville.

Diversity brings stability and is valued. Planning and zoning issues are very important as businesses do not want to be isolated. All too often business considerations have taken a back seat to residential development with the result being that commercial zoning has been ceded to the residential developers. Numerous studies have indicated that industrial development uses less government services than residential. In fact, industrial/farmland generate more revenue than their costs while exactly the reverse is true for residential development.

The expansion of the Jacksonville Port now underway should provide substantial stimulus to development here as our infrastructure is expanded to meet the Port's requirements. This will be watched very closely.