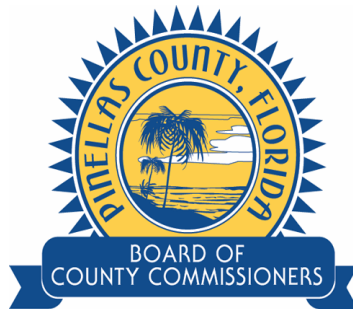


Pinellas County

*950 Lake Carillon Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33716*



Minutes - Final

Thursday, April 8, 2021

1:00 P.M.

Joint BCC/Federal Delegation Meeting

Hilton St. Petersburg Carillon Park

Board of County Commissioners - Work Session

*Dave Eggers, Chair
Charlie Justice, Vice-Chair
Rene Flowers
Pat Gerard
Janet C. Long
Kathleen Peters
Karen Williams Seel*

CALL TO ORDER - 1:10 P.M.

Present: Dave Eggers, Chair; Charlie Justice, Vice-Chair; René Flowers; Pat Gerard; Janet C. Long; Kathleen Peters; and Karen Williams Seel

Federal Legislative Delegation: Representative Gus Bilirakis; Representative Charlie Crist; Gulf Coast Regional Director Taylor Sanchez representing Senator Marco Rubio; and Tampa Bay District Director Luis Laracuente representing Senator Rick Scott

Others Present: Barry A. Burton, County Administrator; Jewel White, County Attorney; Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller; Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser; Sara Mollo, Public Defender, Sixth Judicial Court; Anthony Rondolino, Chief Judge, Sixth Judicial Court; Teresa Ribble, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk; and other interested individuals

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Eggers opened the joint meeting of the BCC and the Pinellas County Federal Legislative Delegation and welcomed the attendees; whereupon, they introduced themselves.

2. Update on the use of COVID19 Relief Funds

Mr. Burton provided a brief introduction and noted that when the initial round of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding became available, the County faced the challenge of quickly devising a system to ensure that the community was provided the needed assistance and then developed programs, processes, and accountability measures to achieve maximum flexibility for distributing the funds as quickly as possible; whereupon, he expressed his pride in the successful work performed by County staff, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller's Office, and various community partnerships.

Strategic Performance Manager Aubrey Phillips, Office of Management and Budget, referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *CARES and COVID Relief* and highlighted the following matters:

- A timeline detailing award and disbursement of funds
- Allocation of funds to the Eviction Diversion Program following passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act
- Community engagement and input
- Financial assistance to individuals and families for overdue rent, mortgage, and utilities
- Grants to non-profit agencies for continued support of food insecurity, behavioral health, and eviction mitigation

- Financial support for workforce retraining and reemployment
- Grants to local businesses for economic recovery
- Grants awarded to licensed childcare agencies and non-profit arts and cultural organizations
- COVID-19 mitigation and response, including reimbursements to local governmental entities

In summary, Ms. Phillips indicated that more than 80 percent of the funds were provided to individuals and families, businesses, non-profit agencies, and local governments to support local response and recovery; whereupon, Mr. Burton noted that discussions are underway regarding clarification of the American Rescue Act funding and how the monies can be leveraged to strengthen the community and provide for a quick recovery.

3. Beach Nourishment Easements

Public Works Director Kelli Hammer Levy related that the next Sand Key beach nourishment project is scheduled for 2024; and that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has stated that all 461 easements within the project area are to be secured by the County prior to nourishment. She noted that following attempts of staff to work with USACE regarding the easement requirement, Representative Crist, the Assistant Secretary of the USACE, and staff met in November; and that while the meeting was productive, a letter was received from USACE stating that the expectation regarding the easements remained the same.

Ms. Levy reported that a letter was submitted to USACE by the County prior to the USACE' budget cycle, which requested that nourishment move forward in the areas where 100 percent of the easements have been secured; and that the USACE advised that the entire nourishment project could possibly be delayed until the 2024 cycle due to the large gaps in easements secured, including in the areas of Redington Shores, Indian Shores, and Indian Rocks Beach; whereupon, she stated that USACE has advised that a formal response will be forthcoming.

Van Scoyoc Associates Vice President Harry Glenn indicated that strategies to keep the project moving forward have been developed and provided information on the following matters:

- Preparation of a funding request to USACE for the facilitation of planning and design for the Sand Key and other Pinellas beach nourishment projects to better ensure the Sand Key project completion during the 2024 cycle
- Discussions with the Federal Delegation requesting congressional support for an amendment to the infrastructure bill regarding a potential reduction in the number of easements being required by USACE

Mr. Glenn acknowledged the ongoing staff efforts and local support regarding beach nourishment and indicated that congressional support is needed.

4. Overview of Board's Federal Legislative Program

Intergovernmental Liaison Brian Lowack provided a document titled *Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners 2021 Federal Legislative Program* and presented an overview of the priorities.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

Mr. Lowack indicated that the current program is expiring on September 30; and that the County is seeking a long-term extension which ensures financial sustainability for the program, as well as premiums for policy holders which do not price them out of their homes. He also noted that the proposed Risk Rating 2.0 program utilizes new technology and data to more accurately assess parcels, but that the data to be utilized is not yet known; and that it will not use Flood Insurance Rate Maps even though floodplain regulations and flood insurance requirements will still be based on these maps.

Later in the meeting and responding to a query by Mr. Twitty, Ms. Levy related that the County has been notified of an improved rating with regard to the Community Rating System program; and that following the required verification of the new rating, she will provide that information.

Beach Nourishment

Mr. Lowack referenced the presentation made earlier in the meeting and thanked the Federal Delegation members for supporting the County's beach nourishment projects. Representatives Bilirakis and Crist agreed to continued bipartisan support regarding this effort.

Transportation/Infrastructure

Noting that the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act is scheduled to expire on September 30, Mr. Lowack indicated that the County is supportive of its reauthorization and the reinstatement of the discretionary bridge program which provided for an 80-percent funding match by the federal government. He related that the Dunedin Causeway bridges are due to be rebuilt; and that there would currently be no federal funds provided. Representatives Bilirakis and Crist indicated that they are committed to supporting earmarked funds in this particular case.

Mr. Lowack indicated that the County is requesting continued funding for local Advanced Traffic Management Systems' projects; and that bipartisan support is being sought for addressing the nation's infrastructure and transportation issues, as well as for local projects focused on sea level rise and storm surge issues; whereupon, he noted the importance of

the federal government's engagement in discussions which deal with identifying a sustainable method for funding transportation projects.

Offshore Oil Drilling

Mr. Lowack referenced the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006, which included a moratorium on all oil and gas leasing in portions of the Gulf. He indicated that the moratorium expires in 2022; and that the County is hopeful for the passage of a long-term extension. He expressed appreciation to the Senators who introduced legislation last year which would extend the moratorium for ten years; whereupon, Representative Bilirakis remarked that the Florida Delegation is united in the effort; and that he anticipates either a long-term extension or a permanent moratorium.

In closing, Mr. Lowack briefly reviewed four community projects relating to stormwater, beach nourishment, emergency response system, and public water infrastructure, to be submitted for federal funding.

Responding to a query by Representative Bilirakis, Ms. Levy provided an update regarding the Piney Point phosphate plant leakage and potential effects to Tampa Bay. She discussed wastewater flow into the Bay and University of South Florida path modeling; whereupon, she stated that representatives from the USACE and the Environmental Protection Agency are present at the plant; and that regional collaborative monitoring will continue to occur. She encouraged contact with the Incident Commander at the site for specifications on any assistance that could be provided by the Delegation.

In response to a query by Representative Crist, Ms. Levy indicated that dredge spoil from dredging of Port Manatee was held at the Piney Point site. Chair Eggers thanked her for the collaboration with Tampa Bay Water during the Piney Point incident occurrence, noting that the agency is a supplier of water to the region.

5. Open Discussion

Commissioner Long expressed her concern regarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) use of 2012 data for flood map revisions, as well as the potential for increased insurance rates.

Mr. Twitty indicated that the Risk Rating 2.0 methodology just recently became available; that the new flood maps are yet to be adopted; and that the maps determine whether a property is located within a Special Flood Hazard Area and requires flood insurance. He related that the County has had a vulnerability assessment conducted; and that the data utilized for the assessment was more recent than 2012; whereupon, he noted that one positive aspect of the Risk Rating 2.0 is that a more equitable replacement cost system is included in the program. Representative Bilirakis indicated that he would schedule a meeting with Mr. Twitty to discuss this topic.

Mr. Twitty also shared that the County has fostered a bill that would incentivize homeowners who elevate their residential properties through a tax break.

Later in the meeting, Mr. Twitty suggested that the delegation place some pressure on FEMA regarding how potential premiums for Florida under the Risk Rating 2.0 system will compare with premiums under the former system and noted that Florida remains the program's largest donor; whereupon, Representative Crist noted that if the federal government placed debt forgiveness on the table, the program would not need to make up ground through insurance rates; and that it would be an opportunity to make a difference for all citizens.

Responding to concerns raised by Commissioner Long, Representative Crist indicated that issues such as mitigation of rising sea levels are being discussed and could become a part of the proposed infrastructure bill; and that the inclusion of such issues may assist with lowering flood insurance rates; whereupon, Commissioner Long requested that discussions also include the matters pertaining to numerous under-capitalized insurance carriers in Florida and the negative impacts to consumers when rates are artificially low.

Commissioner Seel referenced past discussions advocating for a national catastrophic fund and opined that national disasters will continue to worsen; whereupon, she questioned whether there is movement towards such a fund. Representative Crist related that current weather and climate issues are providing an opportunity to bring this topic forward again, and Representative Bilirakis concurred and voiced his support.

Commissioner Flowers conveyed information related to the number of phosphogypsum stacks present in the State of Florida. She suggested that additional penalties be assessed on companies that leave these stacks unattended and without assurance of safe closures. Representative Crist agreed and indicated that while it is prudent for government entities to fund the remedial actions taken with regard to the Piney Point now, the private owner could be held responsible retroactively.

Mr. Burke expressed his appreciation to Representatives Bilirakis and Crist for pledging their support of legislation which would once again allow for advance refunding of municipal debt.

The federal representatives discussed the following matters:

Representative Bilirakis:

- His work as a ranking member of the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee, including addressing problems associated with mental health in conjunction with social media use
- Partnering with Commissioner Peters regarding local mental health residential and outpatient options

- Future veterans' outpatient clinic in Clearwater
- Continued focus on burn pit veteran issue
- Working together in bipartisanship regarding infrastructure

Representative Crist:

- His work as a member of the House Committee on Appropriations
- Appreciation to the Commissioners and County staff for the work being done and to Messrs. Lowack and Glenn for their presentations
- United work as fellow Floridians rather than as Democrats and Republicans

Commissioner Long discussed information regarding a pilot mental health program to assist members of law enforcement and first responders through the John Morrone Legacy Foundation, as well as a request for a statewide listening tour regarding infrastructure and transportation needs; whereupon, Representative Bilirakis acknowledged the impact of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries and expressed his gratitude for the work being done through the Morrone Foundation, and Chair Eggers provided comments.

Commissioner Flowers thanked Representatives Crist and Bilirakis for their support of veterans and asked that they remain alert to any additional funding for affordable housing.

In closing remarks, Chair Eggers expressed his appreciation to the Delegation members and representatives for being at the meeting, and noted that he looks forward to collaboration in the coming year.

ADJOURNMENT - 2:31 P.M.