

# City of San Antonio



## Minutes Economic and Workforce Development Committee

### 2023 – 2025 Council Members

Chair: Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8  
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4  
Teri Castillo, Dist. 5 | Marc Whyte, Dist. 10

**Tuesday, February 25, 2025**

**2:00 PM**

**City Hall Complex**

The Economic and Workforce Development Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:06 p.m. Assistant City Clerk Jamie Nieto took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

**Members Present:** Manny Pelaez, Chair  
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*  
Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Member*  
Teri Castillo, *Member*  
Marc Whyte, *Member*

**Members Absent:** None

### Approval of Minutes

1. **Approval of the minutes from the Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting on January 31, 2025.**

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the January 31, 2025, Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Pelaez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Whyte

### Public Comments

There were no public comments.

### Briefing and Possible Action on the following items

2. **Consideration of 4 At-Large appointments to the RiverWalk Capital Improvements Advisory Board.** [Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk]



Assistant City Clerk, Jamie Nieto, briefed the Economic and Workforce Development Committee on the Riverwalk Capital Improvements Advisory Board. She stated that the Board was comprised of seven members: three were City department directors and four were At-Large seats. She noted that there were four At-Large seats open to serve on the Board.

Nieto stated that a total of 14 applications were received, eight applicants were ineligible due to category requirements, and six applicants were eligible. She reported that of those six, Marco Barros withdrew his application.

Nieto noted that Christopher Hill provided a written statement and Terrin Fuhrmann, Charlie Riley, Dominic Pedro Silva, and Sam Panchevre were interviewed by the Committee.

Chair Pelaez recessed the meeting into Executive Session at 2:35 p.m. to discuss the applications. Chair Pelaez reconvened the meeting in Open Session at 2:47 p.m. and announced that no official action had been taken in Executive Session. Chair Pelaez thanked all applicants for their interest.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to recommend and forward the reappointment of Charlie Riley and Sam Panchevre, and to appoint Dominic Pedro Silva and Christopher Hill to the Riverwalk Capital Improvements Advisory Board to the full City Council for consideration. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Pelaez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Whyte

**3. Proposed Construction Mitigation Grant Program.** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Margaret Toscano, Economic Development Department Contract Manager, provided background on the three previous Construction Mitigation Grants that were all administered by LiftFund. She noted that feedback was gathered through the Construction Corridor Small Business Survey, individual outreach, the Small Business Advisory Council, a 2023 program audit, and a survey of 2023 grant recipients. She stated that the questions focused on business challenges, engagement strategies, customer engagement strategies, and access to construction mitigation programs. Toscano indicated that with feedback received, staff was proposing a 2025 Construction Mitigation Program.

Toscano stated that the City Council approved \$1.4 million in General Funds to continue support of small businesses impacted by construction. She noted that staff were proposing three separate grants (pre-construction, active construction, and post-construction, in which the pre and post construction would be pilot programs).

Toscano reported that the Budget allocated for the active construction grant was \$1 million and the grant amount was up to \$35,000, which could assist up to 40 small businesses. She indicated that the funds could be used for business-related expenses such as rent, mortgage, payroll, and utilities. Toscano stated that the two corridors selected for the active phase were Zona Cultural and South Alamo streets. Toscano reviewed the business criteria and the scoring criteria for grant awards. Toscano provided an overview of the Pre-Construction Pilot Program, which was budgeted for \$80,000 with an individual grant amount of \$2,000 to assist up to 40 small businesses. She



reviewed the eligible uses of the grant funds. Toscano indicated that the eligible corridor for the grants was Marbach Road Area Streets & Drainage.

Toscano reported that the Post-Construction Pilot Program, which was budgeted for \$120,000 with an individual grant amount of \$5,000 to assist up to 24 small businesses. She reviewed the eligible uses of the grant funds. Toscano indicated that the eligible corridor for the grants was Bynum Ave. Phase 2, Bulverde Road Phase 1, and the Broadway Street Corridor.

Toscano reviewed the business criteria for the pre- and post-construction grants and the marketing and outreach to be provided. She stated that the 2025 proposed Construction Mitigation Program would be brought before the City Council at a B Session on March 19, 2025, and the City Council would consider an agreement with LiftFund for administration of the program on March 27, 2025. She reviewed the program timeline.

## DISCUSSION

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if funds other than American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the General Fund were considered to fund the Program. She wondered if cost savings from construction programs could be allocated to the Program.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia expressed concern regarding the amount budgeted for individual Pre-Construction Grants. Toscano stated that based on feedback and research, staff calculated that a range between \$500 and \$2,000 could be used for social media and Uber in that phase. She noted that the funds could also be used for signage. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that in Council District 4, many businesses did not utilize social media and Uber and made only cash transactions.

Councilmember Castillo asked if, in terms of the feedback from businesses and the construction delays that were mentioned, Public Works and/or the Economic Development Department had identified any trends. Luis Martos, Assistant Director of Public Works, stated that every time a project was completed, there was an assessment performed and the next time a contractor bid on a project those scores were taken into account before the next contract was awarded. He added that a contractor that had historically not performed with the City would not receive another City contract.

Councilmember Castillo requested that vape shops be added to the list of excluded businesses. Brenda Hicks-Sorensen stated that vape shops were on the list of excluded businesses.

Councilmember Whyte expressed concern regarding the scoring criteria of the Equity Atlas, which was based on the physical location of the business. He stated that he would like to see the scoring criteria altered. He mentioned that the administrative fee posed by LiftFund was high. Hicks-Sorensen indicated that the fee was higher due to the performance of site visits by LiftFund. Councilmember Whyte noted that the survivability rate was 13% higher among past grant recipients. He asked if any other data was available to substantiate this. Hicks-Sorensen stated that because the Program was new, staff shared the current data.

Councilmember Viagran requested data on who applied, who was awarded, and who was not awarded for Council District 3. She recommended tracking the timeline to provide information to



businesses and requested a list of business owners who lived on the South Side and had their businesses on the North Side and vice versa.

Councilmember Whyte moved to bring the Item before the City Council at a B Session. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Pelaez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Whyte

**4. ARPA Small Business Implementation Plan Update** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Caitlin Cowart, Manager of the Economic Development Department (EDD), stated that the plan was approved by City Council in 2022 and work immediately began with the grant programs, first with the COVID Impact Grants Program, then with the Construction Grants Program. She indicated that the Phase 2 priority focused on access to capital, sustainability and resiliency, and a coordinated ecosystem. Cowart reported that the Budget was allocated into five different priority areas with a total budget of \$33.9 million. She added that nearly 2,000 participants had benefited from these programs as of February 2025.

Cowart reviewed the performance metrics, which were tracked from month to month and were shared on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Dashboard. She reviewed the programs under the following categories: Access to Capital, Capacity Building, Ecosystem Enhancement, Localism, and Geographic Placemaking. She reviewed the next steps, which included the continued implementation of Phase II programs.

Chair Pelaez requested an update on funding for Prosper West. Assistant City Manager, Alex Lopez, stated that the General Funds that had previously been allocated to them have been repurposed and they were not receiving General Funds anymore, however, they were still receiving support from ARPA Funds and our contract with LISC SA.

Councilmember Castillo asked if EDD anticipated a Budget line item to continue the Façade Program within the next year. Hicks-Sorensen stated that staff were in the early stages of assessing the program and were also waiting for Budget guidance and for the City Council Goal Setting Session.

Councilmember Whyte asked how success was measured for some of these programs. Cowart stated that some of the metrics assessed were revenue increase, jobs created, and jobs retained.

Councilmember Whyte asked if staff were tracking the businesses receiving Zero Interest Rate Loans. Cowart stated that the research intelligence team has been mapping that out and looking at over the course of the years of the Program. Councilmember Whyte noted that he wanted to see the results from these programs to continue funding them.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia stated that she had heard a lot of positive feedback about the Zero Interest Program and wondered if it would be funded past September 2025. Cowart stated that LiftFund was working to identify matching funding to bring to the Program as well as to leverage



some ARPA Funds. She stated that staff was working to identify a funding partner. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how much Wells Fargo had committed to the Program. Cowart replied that those discussions were underway, and she noted that last year over the two-year Program for fiscal year 2024 and 2025 Wells Fargo committed \$500,000.

No action was taken on the Item.

**5. Small Business Ecosystem Impact Study RFP** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Cowart stated that the Economic Development Department (EDD) was planning a competitive solicitation with the goal of identifying a vendor to conduct an impact study. She indicated that the impact study would be an update to the 2020 Small Business Ecosystem Study. Cowart noted that the study was conducted by Next Street and Common Future, and it identified an \$8.3 billion annual gap in access to capital, disproportionately affecting the South and East Sides. She stated that the study identified solutions, which included access to flexible capital, sustainability and resiliency, and access and networking.

Cowart mentioned that the 2022 Strategic Framework found that private sector employment by small businesses was 10% lower than the national average and identified EDD as a convener, playing a function to small businesses, and strengthening connections of the various ecosystem partners. She indicated that the City had invested \$42 million since 2022 in small businesses.

Cowart stated that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Small Business Implementation Plan: increased investment in Launch SA by \$1.7 million over the course of three years, funded the SA Link Ecosystem Mapping Tool for \$118,125.

Cowart stated that the report would assess the current state of the ecosystem and measure the impact of investments made in small businesses across the ecosystem since 2020.

Cowart noted that all findings of the report would be supported by qualitative and quantitative research and data. She reported that the contract would be for no longer than one year or until project completion, whichever came first. Cowart indicated that the Budget was \$100,000, which was available through the EDD General Fund Budget.

Cowart stated that there would be a Small Business Advisory Committee (SBAC) representative on the evaluation committee for this Request for Proposal (RFP). She noted that staff planned to distribute the RFP in a couple of days with contract approval in May 2025. She indicated that a final report would be made by December 2025.

Chair Pelaez noted that Rod McSherry from UTSA was on the selection committee. He asked if that would preclude UTSA from applying. Cowart stated that another part of UTSA could potentially apply.

Councilmember Whyte asked if the City reviewed whether support for small businesses was successful. Cowart replied that the report would demonstrate where the City stood regarding access to capital and some of the findings of the previous study. She stated that one of the priorities was



identifying where we stood in that gap.

Councilmember Castillo stated that she understood the need to perform a study but had heard from individuals who worked closely with small businesses regarding what was and was not working and she wanted to ensure that the City was valuing that input.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if the study would be a replication of the study performed in 2020. Cowart stated that there would be some similar information, but the 2020 study did not include the impact of specific programs. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if there was a way to focus specifically on restaurants. Cowart replied that the intent of the study was to look at the larger ecosystem, however, staff recognized the importance that restaurants and hospitality played. She noted that staff were reviewing internal resources to perform analysis specific to restaurants.

Councilmember Viagran stated that it was important to review trends with the Office of Sustainability for mapping of the small business ecosystem.

No action was taken on the Item.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

**Approved**

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*Manny Pelaez, Chair*

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*Debbie Racca-Sittre  
City Clerk*