

**ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2021 2:00 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	Councilmember Manny Pelaez, <i>Chair, District 8</i> Councilmember Phyllis Viagran, <i>District 3</i> Councilmember Adriana Rocha Garcia, <i>District 4</i> Councilmember Teri Castillo, <i>District 5</i> Councilmember John Courage, <i>District 9</i>
<b>Staff Present:</b>	Alex Lopez, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Christina Ramirez, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; Ray Rodriguez, <i>Deputy City Attorney</i> , Debbie Racca-Sittre, <i>City Clerk</i> ; Aurora Perkins, <i>Deputy City Clerk</i> ; John Peterek, <i>Assistant to the City Manager</i> ; Brian Dillard, <i>Chief Innovation Officer</i> ; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, <i>Director, Economic Development Department</i> ; Justina Tate, <i>Assistant Director, Economic Development Department</i> ; Shahrzad Dowlatshahi, <i>Chief of Diplomacy &amp; Protocol Officer/Head of Global Engagement Office, Economic Development Department</i>
<b>Others Present:</b>	None

**Call to Order**

Chair Pelaez called the meeting to order at 2:03 P.M.

**Public Comment**

None.

**1. Approval of the minutes from the Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting on August 17, 2021.**

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to approve the minutes of the Economic and Workforce Development Committee on August 17, 2021. Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. The motion prevailed unanimously.

**2. Briefing on SA Digital Connects.** [John Peterek; Assistant to the City Manager and Brian Dillard, Chief Innovation Officer, Office of Innovation and Smart Cities]

Brian Dillard, Office of Innovation presented a briefing on SA Digital Connects: San Antonio and Greater Bexar County Community Digital Equity Plan and Roadmap. Mr. Dillard described the community scope of work and the community advisory group as well as return on investment for individuals, society and economy. He explained that the goal was to provide equitable availability, affordability, device access, and adoption support of broadband. Mr. Dillard described the plan as being based on eight key performance indicators using a portal dashboard to ensure transparency and accountability. He outlined a \$600 million investment by local, state, and federal governments as well as the private sector over 5 years with the first 3-years upfront costs making up the majority.

Mr. Dillard introduced Luisa Casso, Chair of the founding board of SA Digital Connects, who provided an overview of the governance model for SA Digital Connects as a private organization with public support. SA Digital Connects will be recruiting more members of its board, its fiscal agent is Greater

SATX that they had recently hired an Executive Director, Marina Alderete Gavito, whom she introduced. Ms. Casso explained that the partners must advocate for federal and state funding for these efforts. Mr. Dillard announced that San Antonio was the only major city in Texas with a plan for reducing the digital divide

Chair Pelaez requested a list of current board members for SA Digital Connects which Mr. Dillard stated the board members were Chair, Luisa Casso; Vice Chair, Brian Dillard; and Secretary, Laura Cole.

Councilmember Courage applauded the effort to bring in local governments and the community and supported seeking private, State and Federal funding. Councilmember Courage recommended seeking the internet service providers to become more involved. He was concerned about cost of internet service and hoped that all people could be served regardless of income.

Councilmember Castillo asked if partnerships with Port SA had been leveraged as well as school districts. Councilmember Castillo asked how much of the \$27m of connected beyond the classroom funding had been spent, Mr. Dillard replied that \$18 million had been spent and described the partnerships with school districts as well as deployment of vertical assets. Councilmember Castillo requested a report on the pilot program.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted the report contained lessons learned from other cities such as Seattle. Mr. Dillard responded that SAISD hired an Internet Service Provider (ISP) expert who was on retainer for the coming year to help ensure we learned from mistakes of other cities. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked about the existing fiber and offered to discuss this further with AT&T. With more than 80 organizations providing service, Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how the committee could ensure all were working together. Ms. Casso explained that SA Digital Connect would be using OCI and Mr. Dillard stated that Office of Innovation plans to hire an internal position to remain engaged with SA Digital Connect. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested a dashboard be created to see the progress being made and asked when the annual report would be completed since the project has already been underway for eight months. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that often infrastructure was old: copper wires and older neighborhoods may have low roofs or tree canopy that impede the progress. Community partners and ISPs should provide support to help solve these issues and assist residents.

Councilmember Viagran noted that the digital divide was great in District 3 and requested a mapping of the 140+ stakeholders that contributed by Council District. Councilmember Viagran recommended seeking more private funding now instead of waiting on a bill to pass at the Federal level for the funding as well as accelerating the timeline for getting devices and infrastructure out to our citizens.

Councilmember Courage suggested that this project could possibly piggyback on CPS Energy's Smart Metering Program. Mr. Dillard opined that connecting to CPS Energy's smart meters could be a security risk to the energy grid and these were generally wireless which was not the strongest connection for internet.

Councilmember Viagran declared that she wanted fiber, not wireless for her residents.

Councilmember Castillo agreed with Councilmember Viagran and called for a conversation with full Council regarding the Bond Program funding for fiber.

Chair Pelaez asked Jeff Coyle, Assistant City Manager for an update on State and Federal funding. State Special Session was appropriating \$16 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding with \$500 million dedicated for broadband statewide with a focus on rural areas, however, Mr. Coyle noted that the City had told the state we were ready to implement broadband and the urban areas had great need as well. Chair Pelaez asked for the Communication Workers of America (CWA) to be partners because they were the ones to install the fiber infrastructure. Chair Pelaez suggested that there were many people who were socially isolated and needed access to the internet for their health and well-being.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia explained that schools could benefit from e-rate and asked Mr. Coyle to provide more information regarding expanding e-rate funding to the homeowners.

**3. Briefing and possible action regarding vacant At-Large seat for the San Antonio Economic Development Corporation.** [Debbie Racca-Sittre; Interim City Clerk]

Justina Tate, Assistant Director of the Economic Development Department, stated that SAEDC was created in 2010 to create long term economic growth and was governed by a seven member board of which, three members were at-large. The position vacancy had been advertised, and 18 applications were received, with 16 eligible. Ms. Tate recommended the creation of a shortlisting subcommittee to review the 16 eligible applicants and EWDC would interview the short list.

Councilmember Courage recommended the committee act as the shortlisting subcommittee.

Councilmember Castillo made a motion to establish a subcommittee and offered to serve on the subcommittee and Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Viagran made a motion to appoint Councilmembers Castillo and Rocha Garcia to the subcommittee and Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia made a motion to add Councilmember Cabello Havrda to the subcommittee. Councilmember Courage seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**4. Briefing and possible action on Latin American Relationships and Sister Cities.** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Shahrzad Dowlatshahi, Chief of Global Engagement for the Department of Economic Development, described the San Antonio Metro Priority Plan which was an International Strategy to guide the work done in global engagement using Brookings Institute Study data. Ms. Dowlatshahi explained that Frankfurt, Mexico City, Seoul, Tokyo and Toronto were identified as potential for economic engagement through the study. Ms. Dowlatshahi explained the factors, in addition to the Brookings study, that were reviewed to determine target cities in Latin America including: trade agreements, UNESCO designations, University agreements, US military relationships, ease of doing business, local GDP, alignment with target industries, diaspora in San Antonio, population size, and stakeholder surveys. The countries with the highest mentions in the survey as well as increased growth in the San Antonio population were Brazil, Columbia, and Panama. Cities reviewed were Curitiba, Brazil; Bogota, Columbia; and Panama City, Panama.

Ms. Dowlatshahi suggested a regional approach would provide the most beneficial relationship and recommended the geographic neighbors of Columbia and Panama noting the airport has been seeking direct flights from these two countries and World Heritage had targeted them as well. Ms. Dowlatshahi highlighted key points of Bogota, Columbia and Panama City, Panama. Staff recommends the creation of a community task force including Columbia and Panamanian local communities to review plans to add Bogota and Panama City as Sister Cities with Cultural Mission to these two cities in FY2023 and signing of sister city relationship agreements in FY2024 or FY2025.

Councilmember Viagran supported both Bogota and Panama City but would like to keep Brazil on the list; which Ms. Dowlatshahi replied would be done.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia was glad the City would keep Brazil under consideration but also noted that Columbia was an innovator in Bus Rapid Transit. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported sharing information back and forth with other cities and mentioned the City's relationships with the Canary Islands and the horrific natural disaster happening with the volcano eruption and earthquakes.

Councilmember Courage pondered if the other countries were politically and economically stable and wondered about their view of United States for example, the history of the Panama Canal. He stated that the future of San Antonio included looking South, with San Antonio being the gateway to the United States from South America.

Chair Pelaez recommended including Siclovia in the conversation as San Antonio was the first American city to host a Siclovia, which was started in Columbia as well as the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) which could be a big connection to Latin American countries. Chair Pelaez also noted that the Ambassador of Columbia came to San Antonio to discuss direct flights to Bogota. Ms. Dowlatshahi mentioned that the City would be welcoming a delegation of Latin American Consuls in December with a tour of CIA.

General Juan Ayala recommended to leverage military connections with Latin America to assist with these conversations as there were high level individuals from these two countries already in place.

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

Chairman Pelaez recessed the Economic and Workforce Development Council Committee meeting into Executive Session at 3:28 PM to discuss the following:

- A. Consultation with the City Attorney's Office concerning attorney client matters under Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code.

Chairman Pelaez reconvened the meeting at 3:54 PM.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:55 PM.

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*Manny Pelaez, Chairman*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

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*Debbie Racca-Sittre  
Interim City Clerk  
Office of the City Clerk*

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