

**ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 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>
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**Call to Order**

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

Chair Pelaez thanked Russell LeDay from San Antonio for Growth on the East Side (SAGE) for providing Halloween candy bags for the Committee.

**Public Comment**

None.

**1. Approval of the minutes from the Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting on October 12, 2021.**

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to approve the minutes of the Economic and Workforce Development Committee Meeting on October 12, 2021. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion prevailed unanimously.

**2. Briefing on Economic Development Strategy Request for Proposal.** [Alejandra Lopez; Assistant City Manager and Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development Department]

Alex Lopez, Assistant City Manager introduced Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development Department who presented the Economic Development Strategic Planning Initiative which included hiring a Consultant to develop the four-year plan which should include short- and long-term goals as well as a budget for implementation. Hicks-Sorensen emphasized the resilient economy and the need to update the plan. Hicks-Sorensen outlined the timeline and process for selecting a Consultant to comprehensively engage the community and update the plan using best practices and other relevant data.

Councilmember Viagran asked about tourism competition and how it might be included in the strategic plan, noting that she wanted to avoid a race to the bottom if the tourism industry did not bounce back. Hicks-Sorensen explained that targeted industries were the focus of economic development strategies, and that key indicators and incentive tools would be a part of the review by the Consultant. Hicks-Sorensen noted that Hospitality industry strategies was a conversation normally led by tourism partners, although it was also a part of the small business conversation. Councilmember Viagran wanted to ensure that hospitality and other small businesses were included and asked how much money was allocated for the plan. Hicks-Sorensen reported that the amount budgeted for the Consultant was

\$250,000 and staff would issue the Request for Proposals (RFP) without going to Audit Committee because it was not considered a high profile solicitation.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how the Consultant would take other past plans into consideration. Hicks-Sorensen responded that other plans were listed but there would not be a deep dive into those other plans, however, this plan would review the role the City should play in developing a resilient economy. Councilmember Rocha Garcia wanted to ensure that this was not going to be another plan that was in its own silo. Assistant City Manager Alex Lopez acknowledged that plans in the past have been in silos, but this was an effort to break down silos.

Councilmember Castillo wondered if increasing the tax base had equity at its foundation. Hicks-Sorensen described economic development as sometimes being a double-edge sword but felt that finding the right Consultant with the right best practice experience would be key. Councilmember Castillo asked about the targeted audience of the community/stakeholder engagement. Hicks-Sorensen replied that the engagement was comprehensive. Councilmember Castillo wanted to ensure that the Small Business Advisory Committee (SBAC) was consulted.

Councilmember Courage noted that the City already had a list of assets that the City used to draw industry development to San Antonio and wondered what more a Consultant could bring that we did not already know. Hicks-Sorensen replied that a Consultant could provide more data driven analysis related to current trends and that community engagement could help identify what the City might offer that the community would support.

No action was required for Item 2.

**3. Briefing and update on the Embracing Entrepreneurial Equity Program conducted in partnership.** [Alejandra Lopez; Assistant City Manager and Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development Department]

Samantha Diaz, Economic Development Coordinator provided an overview of the program and introduced Mari Zavala and Samantha Salazar of the Maestro Entrepreneur Center and a program participant, Belinda Grace Torrez, owner of Senior Blessings. Diaz explained that the contract with Maestro Center was to serve 10 entrepreneurs who could each receive \$20,000 grants to help improve their businesses and \$50,000 toward administration and training provided by the Maestro Center. Diaz outlined the timeline, scoring and selection process for applicants to the program. Diaz stated that the 10-week accelerator program was currently underway and would be completed by the end of the year. The program participants received hands-on training, networking, mentoring as well as space at the Maestro Center. Diaz presented some positive media coverage on the program.

Chair Pelaez invited program participant Belinda Grace Torrez, owner of Senior Blessings to address the Committee. Torrez thanked the Committee, City, and Maestro Entrepreneur Center for the opportunity to participate in the program. Torrez explained that her business began as a service to God and the program has helped her expand her business which specialized in helping the elderly stay independent. Chair Pelaez suggested that Councilmember Rocha Garcia teach a public relations course at the Maestro Entrepreneur Center; to which Councilmember Rocha Garcia agreed.

Councilmember Viagran appreciated Torrez efforts and creativity in keeping the Latina culture alive since daughters have traditionally helped the elderly but now are busy with other jobs, etc.

Councilmember Viagran added that she loved the entrepreneur program and its successes.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia was encouraged by Torrez' story and expressed excitement about the Entrepreneurial Equity Program especially the work of Senior Blessings in helping seniors and asked if other businesses were focusing on this demographic to provide services adding that dementia was a growing issue that small businesses might be able to help.

Councilmember Castillo suggested that the Government and Public Affairs Department (GPA) could record the seminars to be able to share them with other small businesses. Councilmember Castillo inquired as to whether there was a specific rubric for scoring the program applications. Diaz replied that the points combined different criteria using open ended responses. Councilmember Castillo asked how many in the construction industry applied for the program. Ana Bradshaw replied that there was a separate program for construction.

Councilmember Courage stated that he was impressed with the program and looked forward to hearing more later.

**4. Briefing and update on economic development partner organization contracts for San Antonio for Growth on the Eastside (SAGE), Prosper West, and Southside First Economic Development Council (Southside First).** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Ana Bradshaw, Assistant Director of Economic Development provided an overview of the different partner organizations and introduced representatives: Judith Canales from Southside First; Robert Hernandez from Prosper West, and Russell LeDay from SAGE. Bradshaw explained that these partner organizations served as the front door for small business owners in their respective underserved areas. Bradshaw explained that the partners provided outreach, workforce development, planning, economic development collaboration, and grants and loans to local businesses all while matching 50% of the City's funding to the partner. Bradshaw outlined new contract requirements which included: enhanced metric tracking and quarterly reporting in the areas of small business outreach, referrals and annual outcomes.

Councilmember Viagran asked about the current staffing levels for Southside First, Judith Canales responded that she was the only staff person and one other position was recently added along with interns. Councilmember Viagran advocated for more staff for Southside First in order to be effective within their large service area adding this was an issue of equity.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia and Castillo both recognized Judith Canales for her work and the work of Southside First.

Councilmember Castillo liked the example Bradshaw provided of small business storefront grants provided by SAGE and asked for a list of storefront grants provided by the other organizations. Councilmember Castillo inquired as to whether these organizations had made American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Requests. Bradshaw confirmed that they had not requested ARPA funding.

Councilmember Courage noted that the Southside First organization had a large service area. He suggested using ARPA funding to help all of the partner organizations achieve their mission of helping small businesses in their respective areas.

Chair Pelaez was interested more in what was being accomplished by Prosper West at a future meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:06 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*