

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, October 31, 2023

10:00 AM

City Hall Complex

The Economic and Workforce Development Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:05 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre 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*
Members Absent: Teri Castillo, *Member*
Marc Whyte, *Member*

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of the minutes from the Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting on September 26, 2023.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the September 26, 2023 Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting . Councilmember Viagran seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Public Comments

There were no members of the public signed up to speak.

Briefing and Possible Action on the following items

2. Discussion of Small Business Advisory Commission (SBAC) responsibilities and priorities, and possible action to create a subcommittee to review applicants for the vacant board seats. [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Caitlin Cowart, Economic Development Manager, presented an overview of the purpose and history of the Small Business Advisory Committee (SBAC) which began in 2021. She stated that SBAC was a 15 member commission comprised of 11 Mayor and Council District specific appointments and four at-large appointments. Cowart reviewed policies and regulations affecting small businesses outside of the Small Business Economic Development Advocacy (SBEDA) Program.

Cowart reported that the SBAC developed an Economic Development Strategic Framework, oversaw the ARPA Small Business Implementation Plan, and focused on specific strategies to help small businesses. Cowart noted that there was one vacant at-large position and there were currently 13 applicants for that one position and two at-large appointees currently in holdover. Cowart recommended development of a Subcommittee to review the 13 applications and short list them for interviews by the Economic & Workforce Development Committee (EWDC)

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if the Committee had reviewed the responsibilities and how many were in holdover. Cowart explained that the responsibilities had been reviewed during orientation of the SBAC Members and three members were in holdover, one council district and one at-large.

Councilmember Viagran recommended a review of the responsibilities of the SBAC to set expectations and goals so that there could be better alignment with the priorities of economic development. Councilmember Viagran requested a timeline for the Subcommittee to review the applicants and suggested waiting until the full Economic & Workforce Development Committee (EWDC) was in attendance before developing a Subcommittee of SBAC.

Chair Pelaez explained that Councilmember Castillo was absent due to a family emergency but recommended developing a Subcommittee of the EWDC in order to review the application. He mentioned that while the responsibilities of the SBAC could be reviewed and updated at any time, the list of responsibilities was quite broad. Chair Pelaez recommended that the individual Board Members should check in regularly with their Councilmember.

Chair Pelaez asked if delaying the review of the applications would adversely impact the work of the SBAC and the department. The goal was for new members to attend a January 2024 retreat and Goal Setting Session per Ana Bradshaw.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia clarified that staff was requesting to establish a Subcommittee of the EWDC to review the applications and shortlist them. Chair Pelaez asked Councilmembers Viagran and Rocha Garcia to serve on the Subcommittee and review the applications.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

3. **Briefing on the 2023 Digital Inclusion Survey and Assessment.** [John Peterek, Assistant to the City Manager; Brian Dillard, Chief Innovation Officer, Office of Innovation]

Brian Dillard, Chief Innovation Officer, provided an overview of the partnership with Bexar County and the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to survey community members (with a focus on senior citizens and small businesses) regarding their access to broadband internet.

Dillard reported that 82% or 440,000 San Antonio households were now connected to broadband internet which was an increase of approximately 11,000 more than in 2020. He noted that the survey also indicated increased connectivity, especially in unserved or underserved areas, and showed positive, intentional impact.

Digital Literacy, according to Dillard, was measured through the survey which showed that 84% of respondents could confidently search the internet and 68% could recognize an internet scam. Dillard stated that 75% of respondents had a mobile phone, but 34% did not have a computer in their household.

Dillard concluded that since 2020, there had been significant increase in access, specifically in low equity communities. He stated that affordability was still a barrier for low-income residents and privacy and security concerns were a prevalent barrier to adoption. He added that targeted training programs continued to be a desired need for older adults and small businesses.

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Viagran requested a one-page flyer regarding the results that she could share with her seniors. Councilmember Viagran expressed concern with the pop-up tents from the providers offering free devices if the residents signed up for a monthly service and suggested it might be helpful to provide financial literacy education to the residents regarding the need for internet versus cost.

Councilmember Viagran recommended providing the internet service providers with numbers of people working from home or participating in e-sports through Tech Port.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested a map overlay of connectivity speed by zip code and an analysis of why some areas had less coverage. Dillard stated that the Office had worked with AT&T to expand coverage. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that many residents were cost burdened with housing costs or medical bills so they might forego the internet. She requested information on how many surveys were submitted online versus paper and a breakdown of the respondents by age and geography including for small businesses. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested information on when the next survey would begin. Dillard stated that he would provide an update later but it was difficult to map the businesses as most respondents used their home internet protocol (IP) address. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended leveraging partners.

Chair Pelaez asked why there were so many more responses to the 2023 survey versus 2020. Dillard stated that the partners helped spread the word and people were more interested in internet

service than they were a few years ago. Chair Pelaez noted that Councilmembers Viagran and Alderete Gavito had become experts on this issue and recommended including them in outreach campaigns as they were trusted community advocates.

Chair Pelaez noted that older adults were often sold more complicated phones than needed and sometimes relied on the individual retail stores that were helping them set up their applications and learn how to use their phones so he suggested a partnership with the cell phone companies.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

4. Briefing on the SA: Ready to Work program and related workforce development initiatives. [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Michael Ramsey, Executive Director, Workforce Development]

Michael Ramsey, Executive Director of Workforce Development, provided a snapshot of the Ready to Work (RtW) Dashboard. He reported that 12,095 people had started the intake process, 7,453 were officially admitted to the program, 4,726 were enrolled in training, 695 had completed training and 314 were placed in jobs.

Ramsey provided demographics of the participants and a breakdown of the training industries selected by participants which was led by healthcare, information technology and transportation (heavy and tractor trailer truck drivers). Ramsey provided the top ten list of training providers, the placement numbers by partner agency and the ongoing outreach efforts and events.

DISCUSSION:

Councilmember Viagran requested more information on the 381 participants that had completed the education and training program but had not been placed in quality jobs including their age and demographics. Councilmember Viagran stated that the City had many job opportunities and asked how many of the 314 that had been placed in jobs had been hired by the City of San Antonio.

Councilmember Viagran supported including financial literacy training in the program noting the large number of women (65%) in the RtW Program including those that were head of household and had been working more than one job before being accepted into the Program.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that she saw RtW advertising everywhere and offered to pass out flyers at her council district Halloween event this evening. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended telling more of the stories of the participants. She highlighted the focus on persons with disabilities, justice involved, foster involved and other vulnerable populations. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported 78% of the program's training being invested in short-term certificates and recommended development of a special program to help first year teachers pass the State exam as they only had one chance.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported the Memorandum of Understanding with the San Antonio Housing Trust and the San Antonio Public Library (SAPL) but requested a list of library branches. She thanked the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD) for distributing door hangers citywide and offered to provide outreach at the council district holiday events.

Chair Pelaez expressed concern that a large number of people dropped out of the program throughout its life cycle and challenged Ramsey to find out why. Chair Pelaez requested a report on that analysis at a future EWDC meeting.

Chair Pelaez asked about the employers that had pledged versus how many had actually hired RtW participants and suggested direct outreach by the Mayor or City Manager, particularly for those employers that had City contracts. Assistant City Manager Alex Lopez noted that during the Mayor's convenings, the City Manager attended and pushed the program as an opportunity for employers. Chair Pelaez offered to make phone calls and requested a list of those businesses that had pledged and suggested connecting with the Criminal Defense Bar Association as part of their work was to get their clients employed before they went to court.

Chair Pelaez noted that non-citizens were not part of the target but suggested that the Mexican Consulate and Spanish language television could be a good outreach method as it could be something mothers of citizens might help promote to their children.

Councilmember Viagran requested information regarding those in the Associates and Bachelor's degree programs which formerly did not have plans to attend or complete college as well as an estimated completion timeline for the popular training providers.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

5. Briefing on the City's Economic Development Department Strategic Framework and FY 2023 and FY2024 Workplan Updates. [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Brenda Hicks-Sorensen, Director of the Economic Development Department (EDD), provided an overview of the Economic Development Strategic Framework, which had been accepted by the City Council in October 2022. Hicks-Sorensen explained that this comprehensive framework was the result of a year-long collaborative effort.

Hicks-Sorensen mentioned that the framework was built upon four key goals that aimed to enhance ongoing initiatives related to innovation, industry, placemaking, real estate, talent, workforce and capacity and resources. Hicks-Sorensen emphasized that the overarching objectives of the framework were to guide the City towards building a more resilient economy, provide direction for effective competition at the national and global levels and clearly define the role of economic development improvement in the City's future.

The guiding principles underpinning this framework, Hicks-Sorensen stated, revolved around the concept of economic mobility. In the year 2023, Hicks-Sorensen specified a range of priority areas for implementation.

Hicks-Sorensen elaborated that the team had made substantial progress in the realm of Business Intelligence and Data Analytics. She noted that this progress involved the establishment of a data analytics and research team. An important milestone, according to Hicks-Sorensen, was reached with a partnership forged with Launch SA which yielded valuable data. Hicks-Sorensen explained

that this data, to be made publicly available, was channeled through a program called "Size Up," which was expected to be a valuable resource for numerous small businesses.

The approach to Business Recruitment, Retention, and Expansion (BRE), Hicks-Sorensen emphasized, was shifted to a strategic development perspective. Hicks-Sorensen explained that the primary focus was on fostering strong and enduring relationships. Hicks-Sorensen pointed out that the key goal for fiscal year 2024 was the rollout of a robust BRE program.

Hicks-Sorensen highlighted the team's diligent efforts to enhance City messaging. Hicks-Sorensen pointed out that the objective was to ensure effective messaging at various levels: local, regional, national and global. Hicks-Sorensen underlined the crucial role of partnerships in economic development. She mentioned that collaboration with various partners continued as the team aligned with the strategic framework's objectives. Hicks-Sorensen explained that the focus was on outcome based measures.

The collaboration with internal departments, Hicks-Sorensen stressed, was emphasized as essential for a coordinated approach. Hicks-Sorensen mentioned that the team continued to host quarterly department meetings to ensure alignment and cooperation.

Hicks-Sorensen noted that Small Business Support Initiatives were actively pursued. Hicks-Sorensen explained that ecosystem enhancements and strategies related to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) were implemented. Notably, She mentioned that a partnership with LiftFund was established to enhance the 0% interest loan program, making a total of \$1 million available for this purpose.

Hicks-Sorensen detailed that the team relied on the San Antonio Small Business Ecosystem Assessment document as its playbook for small businesses. Regarding Placemaking initiatives, Hicks-Sorensen noted that they were rolled out, including the corridor program and facade improvement grant. Hicks-Sorensen discussed the revised Incentive Policy as a notable achievement. Hicks-Sorensen mentioned that it received approval from the City Council and was scheduled for review every two years to ensure its continued effectiveness.

Hicks-Sorensen explained that the Economic Development Corporation Work Plan was adapted to place more focus on real estate and stated that the effort was complemented by collaboration with neighborhood housing services, and mentioned that the team made significant strides with Supply SA. Hicks-Sorensen explained that the procurement process mapping effort would be presented for consideration by City Council.

Collaboration and support for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Hicks-Sorensen emphasized, were central to the team's efforts. Hicks-Sorensen mentioned that partnerships with organizations like Geekdom were explored, with a focus on enhancing the ecosystem. She detailed that the team was actively developing an ecosystem map to encompass various types of businesses, from main street businesses to startups and everything in between. Hicks-Sorensen noted that efforts continued to streamline internal processes, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in their operations.

In addition to these initiatives, Hicks-Sorensen explained that the team introduced a dashboard

offering a comprehensive view of programs, incentive performance, workforce and economy, the business ecosystem and demographics and trends. Hicks-Sorensen stated that the dashboard provided essential data for economic development goals, job creation, return on investment and more. Hicks-Sorensen encouraged the Committee to explore the dashboard and provide feedback for ongoing improvement.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Pelaez commented that the Strategic Framework helped explain the work of the EDD to the community and provided transparency. Chair Pelaez noted that the visit to Seoul South Korea seemed to be a successful foreign business outreach trip. Hicks-Sorensen stated that her office was actively communicating with staff during and after the trip and EDD was working to develop a robust follow-up plan which leveraged existing relationships and focused on building new ones.

Councilmember Viagran noted that there were tons of opportunities to work with other countries including Mexico adding that the direct flights should make San Antonio and the region more attractive. Councilmember Viagran also recommended larger discussions regarding opportunities for small businesses particularly access to capital for those to invest in the south side. Councilmember Viagran also commented that small and micro businesses were significantly impacted by construction and street closures so she supported efforts toward those construction mitigation grants.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia liked the dashboard but recommended overlaying educational investments such as Pre K 4 SA and the RtW Program. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested measurable outcomes for incentives since a policy review was required. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested more stories to be told about the companies that were staying and expanding in San Antonio and not just the new businesses. Hicks-Sorensen stated that social media and the revised website could be a good place to tell those stories in addition to presentations at EWDC or at City Council.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 11:44 a.m.

Approved

Manny Pelaez, Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk