

# 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

**Tuesday, February 27, 2024**

**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 2:02 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

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

**Members Absent:** Phyllis Viagran, *Member*

### Approval of Minutes

#### 1. Approval of the minutes from the Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting on January 30, 2024.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the January 30, 2024 Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

### Public Comments

There was no Public Comment.

### Briefing and Possible Action on the following items

2. **Briefing by Port San Antonio on the organization's history, its economic development vision and strategy, and overview of recent milestones, accomplishments, and major projects.** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks -Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Jim Perschbach, Chief Executive Officer of Port San Antonio, reported that last year over 2,100 jobs were created and Port San Antonio housed many collaborations including the Alamo Regional Security Operations Center (ARSOC) which was a joint partnership between the City of San Antonio, CPS Energy and Port San Antonio.

Perschbach stated that the Boeing Center at Tech Port was built with a goal of education and business creation, noting that even though the facility regularly hosted concerts and other paid events, it was never meant to make a profit reporting that over 200,000 students came through the facility to learn about science and engineering.

Perschbach displayed a rendering of a new sculptural building that would be built on the campus with 12,000-18,000 new jobs expected to come to the campus as well as hotels, fitness centers, grocery stores and other businesses including a facility for the National Security Agency to expand cyber capability.

## DISCUSSION

Chair Pelaez opened the discussion by referencing Port San Antonio's innovative business plan which led to such tremendous growth including the e-sports arena that hosted multiple concerts and events. He asked of the status of e-sports. Perschbach stated that several hundred students used the facility every day but the plan was to hold an international e-sports competition focusing on our sister cities throughout the world with an emphasis on integrative technologies and gaming interfaces that could be used to enhance human performance.

Chair Pelaez stated that there was a local robotics firm that was building and programming machines in Council District 10 and gaming controllers were used in the development of this technology.

Councilmember Castillo commented that she had attended the San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology (SAMSAT) event where local students were building computers and robots which demonstrated the educational effort that was supported through Port San Antonio. Councilmember Castillo supported the provision of child care at the site.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia thanked the Port San Antonio Board for their leadership and expressed excitement for the new things coming and bridging history with the future for our residents. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported education and training, especially of young girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) for the future of our workforce through TechPort. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended having youth shadow the team at Port San Antonio to learn about the opportunities.

Chair Pelaez asked Perschbach what challenges he had identified. Perschbach stated that basic infrastructure such as streets were sorely needed including connection to the Quintana and General McMullen Corridors with investments in those neighborhoods as well. Perschbach commented

that some people thought the new Innovation Tower Building was too far advanced for San Antonio. He urged the City Council to have optimism and to use the building as a catalyst for the future.

Chair Pelaez asked whether there would be any housing on the campus. Perschbach stated that Port San Antonio owned one apartment complex but there was already a lot of existing housing in the adjacent neighborhoods that provided livable spaces for persons who might work at Port San Antonio which could be improved. According to Perschbach, the project would include a 700-900 child capacity Child Development Center to alleviate the challenges facing the community related to bringing in diverse populations and lifting the neighborhoods.

Chair Pelaez commented regarding his visit to the City of Knowledge in Panama City which was an old U.S. Military Base that was under development and invited Perschbach to attend. Perschbach stated that the British Royal Air Force leadership had used Port San Antonio as a model to reimagine their facilities.

Chair Pelaez closed the discussion by thanking the Port San Antonio Board as well as Perschbach.

**3. Briefing on Launch SA, the front door to small business and entrepreneur support in San Antonio.** [Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager; Brenda Hicks -Sorensen, Director, Economic Development]

Daniel Hicks, Senior Research & Intelligence Analyst with the Economic Development Department, provided an update on the re-launch of Launch SA as a one stop for resources and referrals as well as mentoring for small businesses which had been operated by Lyft Fund. Hicks stated that LaunchSA was located within the Central Library as an accessible location. He added that the City of San Antonio issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) and received a proposal from Geekdom for a 3-year contract which City Council approved in September 2023.

Charles Woodin, CEO of Geekdom, explained that Geekdom was an entrepreneurship hub noting that LaunchSA fit nicely within Geekdom's mission to launch 500 startups. Woodin stated that the plan would include foundational support for small businesses, act as a navigator to connect small businesses to resources and essentially served as the Front Door for small businesses across San Antonio.

Woodin stated that they would host workshops and seminars, provide workspace, host events and connect small businesses to capital or other financial opportunities. Woodin added that marketing was an important component of Geekdom's plan for outreach.

Matthew Espinosa, Executive Director of LaunchSA, was introduced and noted that he was hired in December 2023 after Geekdom took over operations in October 2023.

Hicks provided a list of metrics that would measure the success of the program and stated that there would be renovation of the library space using \$300,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding that was expected to be completed this summer.

Espinosa stated that while the space was under renovation, LaunchSA would continue to provide support for small businesses by hosting events throughout the city.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia recognized Geekdom for helping a group of Ukrainian refugees to keep their small business going. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested updated Impact Reports for the past several years of LaunchSA and recommended that the Office of Innovation participate in the program. She also asked Geekdom for a breakdown of locations where business owners lived in the city and offered to host an outreach event at her council district field office. She requested consideration of mentoring meetings focusing on other markets.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended collaborations with higher education institutions for business consulting. Woodin stated that Geekdom had several partnerships and Espinosa noted the LaunchSA planned to create opportunities for students to network, learn about entrepreneurship and provide information on how students could support small businesses.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked what was evaluated in the net promoter score. Woodin stated that the simple question that measured net promoter was “would you refer someone to LaunchSA” noting any score less than 8 triggered interviews and evaluation of the feedback to improve services. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that access to capital was a huge barrier and suggested development of intervention strategies to prevent small businesses from closing.

Councilmember Castillo requested a breakdown of the 130 small businesses supported by council district. She was pleased to see a 64% increase in sales but requested more details on the firms impacted.

Chair Pelaez commented that this was a significant improvement as it was important that the LaunchSA Program be professional and really helped small businesses succeed.

**4. Briefing and possible action on the City of San Antonio Department of Human Services Early Head Start and Head Start Programs** [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Melody Woosley, Director, Human Services].

Assistant City Manager Alex Lopez introduced Rebecca Flores with the Department of Human Services who provided an update on the Head Start Grant which had a goal of providing high quality child care and a foundation for educational success. She reported that the Head Start Program began in 1979, entered a partnership with the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) and Edgewood Independent School District (EISD) in 2009, was expanded in 2020 to add Early Head Start to EISD, and finished their five year grant cycle this year.

Flores reported that 14,914 children from 13,702 families were served annually to provide quality child care and kindergarten readiness. Flores stated that additionally, the program provided funding to the school districts to expand their services from half-day PreK to full day. Flores mentioned that the program had parent site leaders, a Head Start Policy Council, a Parent Academy for Student Educational Opportunity (PASEO), family support workers, training and healthcare services.

Flores stated that staff was working to develop a five-year strategic plan to include infant/toddler care, job training and workforce outcomes, trauma informed organization, wellness services and staff retention/workforce conditions.

Councilmember Castillo commented that Municipal Court was facilitating a youth truancy

resource day and stated that there was a significant need in SAISD for Spanish speaking parents to obtain a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and recommended coordination with SAISD for their programs.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested that the Head Start Program have a table at the event next year. Flores stated that the program participated with Next Level at the Municipal Court. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) had made any new recommendations regarding slots and asked how many were on the waiting list. Flores stated that UTSA had suggested conversion of some 3-4 year old slots to 0-3 year old slots as this was a significant need with several hundred on the waiting list. She noted that there were workforce challenges which she thought was due to low salaries of \$12 to \$14 per hour. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended that they work with the closing schools.

Chair Pelaez requested performance metrics of the program from inception to today. Flores stated that the assessment had changed over time but she would provide historical data. Chair Pelaez asked what type of building improvements were funded and requested a list of the last 2-3 years of repairs. Flores stated that it could be anything which helped the kids and could range from outdoor learning facilities to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, etc.

Chair Pelaez recommended that Head Start coordinate with the SAISD's Family and Community Engagement Specialists. He recommended ensuring the provision of language interpretation services. Flores stated that there was significant support for Spanish language speakers but there was a greater need for Farsi with the increasing population of Afghanistan refugees, however, the Language Access Program of the City was supporting the program.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

**Approved**

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***Manny Pelaez, Chair***

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***Debbie Racca-Sittre***  
***City Clerk***