

## **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD**

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The Economic Development Advisory Board of the City of Fort Myers, Florida, met in regular session at Oscar M. Corbin, Jr. City Hall, 2200 Second Street, its regular meeting place in the City of Fort Myers, Florida, on Thursday, January 9, 2020, at 9:01 a.m. Present were: Ori Lee Ford, Chair, presiding, Dennis Landfried, Vice Chair, Regular Board Members, John L. Kakatsch, Roy Kennix, and Ken Pariser, Alternate Board Members, Nannette Maxson and Jerome Miller. Also present were: Steven Belden, Community Development Director; Grant Alley, City Attorney; Gwen Carlisle, MMC, City Clerk; and Jennifer Myers, Recording Specialist. Absent: Regular Board Member Alicia Olivo.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Ford called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO FLAG AND ROLL CALL**

Chair Ford led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and roll call was taken by Recording Specialist Myers.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – None

### **REGULAR ITEMS**

1. Minutes of the December 5, 2020 Economic Development Advisory Board Meeting

***MOTION: Board Member Kakatsch moved to approve the Minutes of the December 5, 2020 Economic Development Advisory Board meeting; seconded by Vice Chair Landfried; motion carried unanimously.***

*Board Member Pariser arrived at the Meeting at 9:05 a.m.*

### **PRESENTATIONS**

2. Brad Lunn, General Manager, Edison Mall

Steven Belden, Community Development Director, noted that Sears is closing at the Edison Mall and there is concern for its future. He felt it would be beneficial for the Board to provide input on possible options for the Mall's future and introduced Brad Lunn, General Manager, Edison Mall.

Mr. Lunn mentioned his meeting with the Mayor, City Manager and others to discuss concerns regarding the closing of Sears at the Edison Mall. He stated he has been giving feedback regarding the vacant Sears Building to Washington Prime Group, the Mall's corporate office, even though the Sears building is owned by a third party.

Mr. Lunn noted that they are focused on three areas: Safety, Appearance, and Entertainment. He mentioned that it is important to have a strong security group in place so that customers are safe. Mr. Lunn stated that in today's retail environment, everything that is sold in malls can be bought on-line so there has to be entertainment reasons for people to come to the mall.

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He noted that the corporate office has discussed ideas such as a movie theatre, bowling alley, youth sports complex, another anchor tenant, or an entertainment related venue.

Board Member Maxson noted that she printed a list of ideas for the Edison Mall. She felt that women still like to shop in stores rather than on-line and one of her ideas is a Nordstrom Outlet as there is not one in the area. Board Member Kakatsch asked about JC Penney closing. Mr. Lunn stated that he has not received any information about JC Penney closing.

### **Public Comment**

Mary O'Toole asked about the foreseeable future of Macy's in the Edison Mall and suggested combining the two Macy's stores in the Sears space.

Mr. Lunn noted that he has not heard anything about Macy's closing in the Edison Mall and that both of Macy's businesses are doing very well. Board Member Pariser asked if any of the other anchors are owned independent of the mall. Mr. Lunn noted that Macy's owns only one of its buildings, Dillard's owns its building, and the rest are owned by the Washington Prime Group. He noted that the Senior Director of Development for Washington Prime Group is having a meeting with the Mayor next week and will shed more light on things that could happen in the bigger picture. Mr. Lunn mentioned upcoming localized parking lot events such as the Lee County Sheriff's Youth Activities League Teen Driver Education and Touch-a-Truck. He stated that he has reached out to local venues to get live music in the mall. Clerk Carlisle asked if there is going to be a restoration to the mall. Mr. Lunn stated that they recently completed a large roof project, there will be another large roof project next year, the fountain was updated, and there is a 2020 Capital Plan. Mr. Lunn mentioned that the CEO of Washington Prime Group is committed to developing the property, making it a place where people want to shop and making sure it is strong.

Board Member Miller mentioned that the Edison Mall is going through the same challenges as malls everywhere. He noted possible ideas: A bowling alley experience much like a sports complex, movie theatre experience with nice seats and drinks, farmers market in the parking lot, skydiving simulator, laser tag, and escape rooms. Mr. Lunn stated that they are looking for many venues that will bring people to the Mall. He mentioned they just signed a lease with a sit down restaurant within the mall which will be adding outdoor seating. Board Member Miller suggested interactive play grounds or an aquarium. Mr. Lunn stated that he will pass the information along to the corporate office. Mr. Belden noted that he will request that a representative from the Washington Prime Group attend a future meeting. Chair Ford mentioned that a group in Louisiana took an abandoned mall, refurbished it, and turned into a youth sports complex attraction for tournaments with restaurants and a hotel. He stated that the City is looking for ways to enhance youth sports but there is not enough sport tournament venues or hotel rooms. Chair Ford stated that the mall is an asset because shoppers are out of the sun and rain during the summer months. He asked to be a part of the upcoming meeting with the Washington Prime Group and the Mayor. Chair Ford mentioned that hotels are not close enough to the sport venues and suggested locations for hotels.

*Board Member Kennix arrived at the meeting at 9:17 a.m.*

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Board Member Miller suggested that the mall have an entertainment venue, an interactive water park, an exploration based adventure, hotel, or a convention center to attract events such as the International Conference Services (ICS) Trade Show. Clerk Carlisle mentioned that the Palm Beach Gardens Mall attracts customers because of its upscale clothing type stores and could be a shopping attraction for the Edison Mall. Mr. Lunn stated that there needs to be a good mix to represent the area and that everyone feels comfortable coming to the Mall. He mentioned that he talked to people in the community that have never been to the Edison Mall. Clerk Carlisle mentioned that people are going to Coconut Pointe or the other newer malls. Chair Ford noted that the outdoor malls are miserable in July. Board Member Pariser mentioned that the community perception of the Edison Mall is that it is not a safe place and asked what they are doing to change the safety perception. Mr. Lunn noted that Mike Colditz is the head of security and implemented extensive training for the security force. He also believes in the visibility of the security force and the administration staff so that the public is aware they are present and offenders can be handled quickly. Chair Ford noted that the perception of safety is a problem for the City overall, but that crime is low and ways to change the perception need to be implemented. Chair Ford mentioned that the Board will help in any way to make the Mall work for this community. Mr. Lunn asked that if anyone is in the Mall and sees something that is good or not good, please let him know. He thanked the Board for their ideas. Board Member Kakatsch asked where the Mall office is located. Mr. Lunn stated that they are between Dillard's and Macy's on the backside of the Mall.

Board Member Kennix mentioned hearing a program on future of malls and the biggest threat they are facing come from e-commerce and that over 40% of sales made over the holiday period were through e-commerce. He referred to a newspaper article that discussed malls diversifying their attractions such as a massage therapy center or other kinds of experiences. Mr. Lunn stated that they recognize that there is a lot of factors that impact malls and will continue to explore ways to attract people to a destination for shopping, restaurants, and entertainment. Chair Ford stated that the key is to create an experience for people at the mall. Board Member Maxson suggested integrating ordering on-line with actually coming into the store by possibly having an area that people can order on-line in the store. Board Member Kakatsch noted that Sears encompassed a tire store, paint store, hardware store, and lawn mower or garden store. He suggested that Sarlo Lawn Mowers could cover the missing lawn mower area, Harbor Freight could cover the missing hardware area, and Sherwin-Williams could cover the missing paint store. Board Member Kakatsch asked if Firestone is part of the Mall property and Mr. Lunn replied yes, the mall owns Firestone. Board Member Kakatsch requested that the Firestone store be gussied-up. Board Member Miller noted that a home improvement theme could be a good idea because there is not one close to the mall. Mr. Lunn stated that everything is on the table at this time. Board Member Miller noted that at Councilperson Anderson's Ward meeting the Police Department gave a presentation showing significant crime reduction in the City. Board Member Pariser mentioned that the image of Edison Mall and Fort Myers needs to be improved. Mr. Lunn mentioned they are continuing to work on positive Public Relations (PR) through the news media. Board Member Kakatsch asked if Walmart would consider going into the mall. Mr. Lunn noted that it is not out of the realm. Board Member Maxson stated that the Sears Automotive Center would be a great spot for lawn mowers and a home improvement center.

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## Citizen Comments

Mary O'Toole, resident noted that the Fort Myers Mural Society is looking for places to put murals and it could be an idea for the Mall.

Mr. Lunn stated that they are considering a mural at the entrance of the mall. Clerk Carlisle suggested advertising at the Airport as to the Mall location being near downtown and that there is a new hotel being built that could accommodate the people. Mr. Lunn noted that historically the Mall did not advertise on the perception that everybody knew where the Edison Mall was located but he is finding out that is not the case and will look into that. Vice Chair Landfried mentioned the idea of an IMAX. Mr. Lunn noted that he acquired a full list of great ideas and thanked the Board.

### Edison Mall - Summary of Ideas:

- Any well-known Outlets (Nordstrom, H&H, Banana Republic, Old Navy)
- Night Club
- Bowling Alley Experience
- Cheesecake Factory
- Combine Two Macy's Stores in Sears
- Movie Theatre Experience/IMAX
- Farmer's Market
- Skydiving Simulator
- Laser Tag
- Escape Rooms
- Interactive Playground
- Aquarium
- Youth Sports Complex with Hotel
- Water Park
- Convention Center
- Exploration Adventure
- Upscale Clothing Stores
- Crime Perception Improvement
- Massage Therapy
- Ordering On-line in Stores
- Home Improvement Center (Tires, Paint, Hardware, Lawn Mower, Garden)
- Walmart
- Murals
- Advertising at Airport

## REPORTS

### 3. Community Development Department Director's Reports

#### a) Monthly Building Permit Activity Report

Mr. Belden gave an update on the monthly development activity and permit activity. He mentioned the City Walk project and an apartment project at Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard and Winkler Road. Board Member Kakatsch asked if the City might be getting overbuilt with apartments. Mr. Belden stated that a lot of people are moving to the Southwest Florida area and the apartments are accommodating that growth. He mentioned that there is a debate between rentals, apartments and home ownership. Board Member Kakatsch asked if the rentals attract people from the north who don't want to make a commitment and would rather rent for a year. Mr. Belden stated that does happen plus the millennials want to be flexible and are attracted to a mobile lifestyle. He mentioned that a lot of the apartment developments now are created with amenities. Chair Ford mentioned that the millennials prefer to walk or ride a bike within their community.

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### **BOARD MEMBER FOCUS AREAS, COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

Board Member Kennix mentioned the upcoming NeighborWorks Training Institute Conference in May, 2020 and asked that the Clerk e-mail the information to all of the Board Members. He would like the Board to have a discussion about approaching Council to support the conference. Board Member Kennix noted that he is leaving the meeting for a webinar to discuss the upcoming round in the Federal Home Loan Affordable Housing Program for the Towles Garden project; if they are successful the amount could be as much as \$500,000.

Board Member Miller mentioned that he visited the new apartment complexes and the amenities are very impressive. He stated that Cape Coral did a study on additional multifamily rental units and asked if the City could conduct a similar study to attract developers and get an outside view of absorption. Chair Ford mentioned the study should include how many units being built are affordable for families or individuals making \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year. Board Member Miller noted that he prepared a report regarding that information and will share it at the next meeting. Chair Ford stated that there are young folks who go to college here and leave to work elsewhere because they cannot afford to live here. Chair Ford noted he is discussing affordable housing, not subsidized housing because that is a different discussion. He noted that he does not like to use the word “affordable” because it depends on the location to determine affordability. Board Member Miller felt that the apartments in the pipeline do have a good range of rent amounts. Chair Ford noted that he would like to know what the ratio is based on what is provided for an average family or an individual with a yearly income of approximately \$37,000 to \$40,000 and can they afford to live here.

Board Member Kakatsch noted that the Beach properties are now converted to weekly and monthly rentals rather than yearly rentals and this concept is not available in the City. Board Member Kakarsch asked about the possibility of having a casino in Lee County because there is no casinos along I-75 from Tampa to Immokalee. Chair Ford stated that casinos provide decent paying jobs however, he is not sure of the laws related to casinos, yet they seem to be popping up everywhere. Board Member Miller mentioned that there were plans for a casino concept at the Ramada, Campo Felice and Lofton Island approximately eight or nine years ago. Board Member Kakatsch stated that the City needs something like a casino inland other than the beach. Chair Ford stated that the original plan for The Forum was to make it a destination attraction site with a water park however, something happened. Board Member Miller stated that there is a park plan by Challenger in the budget. Chair Ford stated that he believes the Challenger plans are on the other side of The Forum. Board Member Miller stated that would be a great site for a YMCA. Chair Ford stated that the property is a good area for a youth attraction site, like he mentioned earlier in the meeting, where young people have a place to engage or any family attraction destination site. He noted that Lee County may be interested because they are looking for more influx for youth sports. Chair Ford stated that hotels next to a sport site are great for the leagues, families and organizers of the tournaments otherwise the parents have to travel so far from the venues to the hotels and it is an excellent location at the corner of I-75 between two exits. Board Member Miller noted that the people could be trolleyed downtown.

***MOTION: Board Member Maxson moved to make a report in March or April on event venues and amenities for the City of Fort Myers, seconded by Board Member Kakatsch; motion carried unanimously.***

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Chair Ford asked that in the Minutes the ideas, such as the casino, are listed and bulleted. Board Member Miller asked if it is for the Edison Mall area, or in general. Chair Ford stated that the water park would work in either area because parents are looking for anything to do with water in the summer. Board Member Miller stated that Bradenton activated their riverfront by adding things such as a sunning beach and skate park and their master plan could provide suggestions for the City's Riverfront Master Plan. He noted that the City's Master Plan has many aspects such as a longer pier with a light at the end and he would like to discuss the viability of the plans. Board Member Miller mentioned that an amphitheater is planned as part of the Luminary Project and Convention Center and suggested that Mr. Megazzini be invited to a meeting for a status update on the Luminary project. Chair Ford noted that the City has a lot of waterfront downtown with nothing being done and asked that the Board be provided with the Riverfront Master Plan. Board Member Miller stated that the Board can create options. Mr. Belden stated that he will get a copy of the Riverfront Master Plan and distribute it the Board Members. Board Member Miller asked if it includes the February Workshop recommendations as part of that presentation regarding the DBE Ordinance.

***MOTION: Board Member Miller moved to invite Mr. Bob Megazzini, General Manager, Luminary Hotel to do a presentation on a status of the convention center, Amphitheatre and general happenings; seconded by Board Member Maxson; motion carried unanimously.***

***MOTION: Board Member Miller moved to discuss amenities in the Centennial Park and the Riverfront area and how it relates to the Riverfront Master Plan; Failed for lack of second.***

***MOTION: Board Member Miller moved that the Riverfront Redevelopment Master Plan be presented to the Board; seconded by Vice Chair Landfried; motion carried unanimously.***

***MOTION: Vice-Chair Landfried moved to add an ongoing discussion item on the agenda starting next month on what the Board will present to the City Council and who will be the Board representative to make the presentation; seconded by Board Member Pariser; motion carried unanimously.***

Board Member Pariser asked for the status on the Economic Development Director's Manager Position. Mr. Belden noted that the City Manager had an interview with the individual recommended for the position and he is still deliberating. Board Member Pariser asked whether Board Member Miller can move to the vacant regular board member position. Clerk Carlisle noted that a request has been sent to the Ward 3 Councilperson Watson asking that Board Member Miller be placed in that vacancy, however, she has not heard back from the Councilperson. She mentioned that if the Councilperson does give consent for Board Member Miller to occupy the vacancy, it will need to be approved by City Council at a meeting. Board Member Miller asked if the appointee from Councilperson Anthony resigned because she has not been to a meeting in a while. Clerk Carlisle noted that she has missed three consecutive meetings and it is up to the Board to decide what to do with that position. Board Member Miller asked if the Clerk's Office can reach out to her to find out what her intentions are. Chair Ford noted that she responded that she would not be able to attend this meeting. Board Member

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Miller noted that the citizen that spoke in the meeting earlier, Mary O'Toole, has interests in the Board and he will follow-up with her. Clerk Carlisle mentioned that she can submit an application on the website or by sending it to her. Board Member Pariser noted that membership responsibilities require attendance at a certain number of meetings or have excused absences and members should be held accountable. Chair Ford asked how many absences are allowed. Clerk Carlisle stated that it is generally three consecutive times. Chair Ford mentioned that this is her fourth missed meeting, she missed three prior consecutive meetings in which she didn't call in about her absence and asked the Board how it would like to proceed. City Attorney Alley noted that he will go over the rules at the next meeting before the Board takes action. City Attorney Alley stated that he will report on what the rules are with respect to unexcused absences. Chair Ford asked if the Clerk's Office could send her an email from the Board asking if she feels she will still will be able to serve.

Board Member Miller mentioned that the City website has been updated and he has information for the website's Economic Development section. He mentioned important links and having a Board discussion for potential incentives to put on the website. Board Member Miller mentioned that there are valuable resources in the City of Fort Myers New Business Guide he assembled for assistance with the new business start-up process. He stated that the Board could meet with the Lee County Economic Development Office and see how they can be a part of the City's Economic Development website. Board Member Miller asked what the best process to present what the Board suggests for the Economic Development section of the website, so that it can be implemented. He noted that the information content should be out there for people who are searching online about business in the City of Fort Myers and to promote the City of Fort Myers. Mr. Belden stated that it has been planned all along to create the Economic Development page regardless of the Economic Development Manager position. He stated that any information that can be provided will be helpful and he will begin working with the IT department to establish the page in which things can be added over time. Board Member Miller noted that IT is adding content everyday on the webpage.

***MOTION: Board Member Miller moved to put on the next agenda a discussion about the Economic Development presence on the City Website; seconded by Board Member Landfried; motion carried unanimously.***

Board Member Miller noted that for approximately eight years there has been a vacant parcel where there used to be an ABC Liquor Store on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (MLK). He stated that the parcel is owned by Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and suggested that the City request it from them to create a portal park for a welcome to downtown signage and landscape. Board Member Miller mentioned that it is an ideal portal at a major entrance into the City and he would like the Board to discuss it and come up with a plan. Board Member Kakatsch asked where the property is located. Board Member Miller noted that it is a little vacant parcel FDOT does not use and the City has a process to request vacant land as they did near Seaboard Street. Board Member Pariser asked the name of the cross street. Board Member Miller noted that the cross street at MLK is Huff Street. He mentioned learning in neighborhood charrettes and meetings that portals are important. Board Member Pariser recognized that Board Member Miller performs many extra-curricular activities on the Board's behalf and felt that there is an urgency to get him admitted as a regular board member. Chair Ford noted that a lot of the property near this location belongs to the Seminole Railroad and he heard they are not easy to work when it comes to real estate deals. He noted that the Develop

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Lee Committee looked at the MLK corridor, determining that FDOT's motive for this intersection was to move traffic through Fort Myers as an exchange for people going places and had nothing to do with accommodating the economic needs of the City of Fort Myers. Chair Ford stated that thousands of cars go through the intersection every day which has a big parcel of vacant property and someone needs to come up with something to help calm down the area. Board Member Kakatsch mentioned that it is a good place for a box store. Chair Ford stated that there is enough real estate there to do a number of things and that the location is vital to mobility and economic development. Board Member Maxson mentioned putting in place a pedestrian rail system.

Councilperson Anderson thanked the Board Members that have met with him for sharing their thoughts and mentioned that his office will be reaching out to the Board Members that he has not met with yet to set up a meeting.

Board Member Miller asked about the rules and Sunshine Law pertaining to internal meetings or sub-committees of the Board. City Attorney Alley stated that it depends on the purpose of the sub-committee and what it wants to achieve. He stated that if that information is provided to him, he can analyze it within the parameters of the State Statute and determine whether it complies with the Sunshine Law. Chair Ford noted that if more than one board member is present, it must be publicized so the public can attend. Clerk Carlisle noted that there must be someone present to take minutes. Board Member Maxson stated that the idea was being considered to discuss different concepts for parks and bikes. Board Member Pariser asked if there is a Parks Board. Chair Ford asked if there is a Recreation Board and Board Member Miller stated that there is a Recreation Board but its focus is on youth programs. Clerk Carlisle mentioned the STARS Board.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORTS**

#### **4. Chair's Report (Chair Ford)**

Chair Ford mentioned that he understood that the February Workshop was to review the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program as that is what was successful in the past. He explained that the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Program is administered by the State of Florida, any state government can adopt this program, anybody in the State can be MBE certified, and it is based on a minority status. Chair Ford stated that the City's DBE Program was different in that it was based on economic status and priority was given to those living or operating a business within the City Limits. He stated that the DBE program is the best program because the dollars remain in the City and it helps the ones that need it the most however, there can be both programs. Board Member Maxson asked if it is a finance program. Chair Ford stated that it is an entrepreneurship program helping small businesses get engaged in State contracts. He mentioned that there are other programs and they all have different percentages of engagement. Board Member Miller mentioned discussing how to incentivize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) through this program at the workshop. Chair Ford mentioned that the first thing is to get the City Council to ratify the program again. Board Member Miller stated that there is an Ordinance on the books still and Chair Ford stated that it is not active. Board Member Miller asked what the difference is between active and not being utilized. Chair Ford stated when the City Council ratifies the program, it will be instituted and somebody will administer it. He noted that the person who administers the program and certifications in the

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past was in a position similar to Mike Love's position at the Enterprise Center and purchasing handles the contracts with his engagement. Board Member Maxson mentioned that there must be seminars or advertisement to bring in the businesses. Chair Ford mentioned that it would be the DBE Director's position to solicit businesses, get entrepreneurs involved with the program, and host conferences. He stated that the Airport Authority, DOT, Port Authority, and Small Business Development at FGDCU hosts various networking opportunities for MBE or DBE businesses, contractors and supply buyers.

Vice Chair Landfried asked what needs to be done to move this forward. Chair Ford stated that the purpose of the Workshop will be to go over the programs and have representatives involved in the programs give their insight so that the Board can contemplate the programs. Board Member Miller asked about having a contractor's point of view and recommended inviting Howard Wheeler, President, Chris-Tel Construction who does a lot of minority hiring. Chair Ford stated that Bob Koenig, Vice-President of Construction, Chris-Tel would be the best person to give a presentation to the Board. Recording Specialist Myers read the participants currently invited by the Board to the Workshop; Denise Finn, City of Fort Myers Procurement Manager; Mike Love, Southwest Florida Enterprise Center; Michelle Hylton-Terry, Community Redevelopment Agency, Julio Rodriguez, Lee County Port Authority; and The Small Business Development Center at FGCU. She indicated that there has not been a confirmation from The Small Business Development Center at FGCU to attend the workshop. Chair Ford noted that he will contact the Small Business Development Center at FGCU and ask for a representative to attend. Board Member Miller asked if the Workshop is part of the Board's regular Meeting and Chair Ford replied yes.

### **Summary of Ideas:**

- Yearly Rentals in the City
- Casino
- Water park
- Destination Attraction at The Forum
- YMCA at The Forum
- Youth Attraction Site with Hotel at The Forum
- Activate Riverfront with activities, i.e., sunning beach, skate park
- City's Request of FDOT Property for Portal Park
- MLK Corridor Calming Ideas
- MLK Corridor Vacant Parcel Suggestions
- Crime Perception/Image Improvement Initiatives
- Pedestrian Rail System

5. Next Meeting – DBE Workshop February 6, 2020

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

***There being no further business, it was moved by Board Member Kakatsch; seconded by Board Member Prariser, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 10:19 a.m.***