

**MINUTES OF THE  
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL  
JANUARY 16, 2020 MEETING**

The meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council was held on January 16, 2020 at the offices of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council—1400 Colonial Boulevard, Suite #1 in Fort Myers, Florida. Chair Perry called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM. Ms. Margaret Wuerstle conducted the roll call and announced that a quorum was present.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Charlotte County:** Commissioner Ken Doherty, Commissioner Joe Tiseo, Mr. Don McCormick, Councilman Jaha Cummings

**Collier County:** Commissioner Bill McDaniel, Commissioner Penny Taylor

**Glades County:** Commissioner Donna Storter-Long, Mr. Thomas Perry

**Hendry County:** Commissioner Julie Wilkins, Vice-Mayor Michael Atkinson, Mr. Mel Karau

**Lee County:** None

**Sarasota County:** Commissioner Willie Shaw, Vice-Mayor Chuck Newsom

**Ex-Officio:** Mr. Jon Iglehart—FDEP, Mr. Dennis Ragosta-SWFWMD

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

**Charlotte County:** Ms. Suzanne Graham

**City of Naples:** Councilman Reg Buxton

**Glades County:** Commissioner Donald Strenth

**Hendry County:** Commissioner Mitchell Wills, Commissioner Emma Byrd,

**Lee County:** Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Councilman Fred Burson, Commissioner Frank Mann, Vice- Mayor Ray Murphy

**Sarasota County:** Commissioner Charles Hines, Commissioner Michael Moran

**Ex-Officio:** Mr. Wayne Gaither, FDOT, Mr. Phil Flood—SFWMD

**AGENDA ITEM #4  
PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

**AGENDA ITEM #5  
AGENDA**

Ms. Wuerstle announced that there was a slight change to the agenda, one of our speakers had to cancel due to a family emergency. Reverend Juan Gonzalez took the place of speaker Kelli Barthelemy to discuss his community development organization in Lehigh Acres. A revised agenda was distributed.

**AGENDA ITEM #6  
NOMINATING COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the Nominating Committee met on January 2nd to determine recommendations for the RPC's 2020 Executive Committee. The recommendations were as follows:

Chair: Commissioner Willie Shaw  
Vice-Chair: Mr. Don McCormack  
Secretary: Vice-Mayor Michael Atkinson  
Treasurer: Councilman Fred Burson

**A motion was made by Commissioner McDaniel to accept the Nominating Committee's recommendation as presented and seconded by Donna Storter-Long. The motion passed unanimously.**

**AGENDA ITEM #7  
MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 12, 2019 MEETING**

Commissioner McDaniel pointed out a typo on page 2.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Storter-Long to approve the minutes as amended. This motion was seconded by Mr. McCormick and passed unanimously.**

**AGENDA ITEM #8  
PRESENTATIONS- QUALITY OF LIFE**

**AGENDA ITEM #8(a)  
PASTOR JUAN A. GONZALEZ- NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION**

Pastor Juan Gonzalez, President and CEO of The Hive Community Development Corporation, Inc., discussed the community of Lehigh and mentioned that it is one of the fastest growing communities in the nation, and a very diverse/mixed community. Pastor Juan went on to discuss The Hive's mission to achieve a healthier, more progressive community that is vibrant and inclusive, that builds knowledge, dignity and self-worth of all living and working in unincorporated Lehigh Acres. Pastor Juan emphasized the importance of leadership and organization within a community, as well as building relationships. He spoke on the community of Lehigh and how there is a lack of leadership and government involvement because they think from the top down rather than bottom up working with the community. He shared that when he began to research the relationships and leadership involvement within the community, he found that not everyone is on the same page and although Lehigh is a part of Lee County, they are an unincorporated area without their own governance.

Pastor Juan went on to discuss the importance of infrastructure and hearing the voice of the people within the community. He stated the lack of support from the county commissioners, and the need for someone to be in charge of the implementation of projects. Pastor Juan felt that this isn't something the government can do by itself. Commissioner McDaniel comments on Pastor Juan's thoughts on the lack of government support and stated that he would like to have a more in-depth conversation on this issue. Pastor Juan concluded with stressing the importance of listening to the people within a community and government and citizens coming together to create positive changes in the community development. Ms. Wuerstle asked how many people are currently involved with The Hive, and Pastor Juan stated that there are about 200 people involved. Mr. Don McCormick asked if the 3 merchant associations are based on existing corridors, and Pastor Juan said yes. Commissioner McDaniel asked if The Hive has investigated a CRA designation, or economic development criteria and opportunity zones and if there is cooperation among county commissioners. Commissioner McDaniel said that it is important to get the county commissioners involved going forward with the process.

**AGENDA ITEM #8(b)**  
**DR. THOMAS FELKE- FOOD INSECURITY**

Dr. Thomas Felke, Associate Professor at Florida Gulf Coast University presented on food insecurity. He began with stating that hunger and food insecurity are two different things and it is important to understand the difference between the two. Hunger is typically when you haven't had enough food but have access to more. Food insecurity is generally brought together with poverty, which means there is a lack of consistent access to food. Dr. Felke stated that homelessness is becoming more and more visible within communities along with social isolation, and research shows that all these issues can be tied together. Dr. Felke showed statistics of poverty rates in southwest Florida counties, which are in the double digits. In the rural counties there are higher levels of poverty, and in Florida in general poverty levels are higher than the national averages. He went on to say that if you spend more than 30% of your income on housing costs, you are categorized as housing burdened, all counties in Southwest Florida except Hendry County hit the 30% standard. Dr. Felke shared that on a national level 37 million people are food insecure and this number has declined in recent years. These numbers

are so high because the United States does not look at food access as a human right, we look at it as a privilege. It is not just people living in poverty that are food insecure, there are working family households that are food insecure and have to utilize SNAP benefits if they are eligible. He also stated that about 55% of food insecure individuals fall below the SNAP eligibility threshold. Dr. Felke went on to discuss food deserts, which are present in SWFL. In rural areas if a grocery store is more than 10 miles away it is considered a food desert. The issue with this is lack of transportation in those areas. Even if your shopping only takes 30 minutes, if you need to use public transportation, you're looking at multiple hours to get to the supermarket, do your shopping, wait for transportation and return home. Dr. Felke went on to say that advocacy is needed, and SNAP benefits needs to be reevaluated and expanded. He also discussed the major issue that food waste poses. When food is shipped all over the U.S the temperature changes and sometimes by the time it gets to its destination temperature has changed and the stores no longer want the shipment It is then dumped into the trash and wasted. He explained that there is an app being created so that if truckers who oversee shipping food are going to waste/dump the food that the stores no longer want, they will instead be able to find the nearest foodbank to donate the food. Mr. McCormick asked Dr. Felke to comment on the ill-fated Adam Putnam initiative to get local foods into the schools, Dr. Felke responds that he cannot comment because he doesn't know enough on that yet. Commissioner Shaw commented on the resale of food products by individuals who pay market price but then sell these items at a higher price to others in underserved and privileged areas. He asked how these people get away with doing this. Dr. Felke responded that they are taking advantage of the situation, however just like SNAP fraud, there really isn't hard proof to do anything about the issue. Commissioner McDaniel brought to attention that out in Immokalee there are a lot of undocumented immigrants who need SNAP benefits but can't and won't go apply because of their undocumented status so typically they are the ones who get taken advantage of when it comes to upselling necessary food items. Dr. Felke commented that better processes need to be put into place. Councilman Cummings raised the question, about whether SNAP benefits were eligible to be used at Fish Markets? This is a healthier option for people who have SNAP benefits rather than using the benefits for fast food or unhealthy options. Dr. Felke responded that food retailers can use SNAP benefits because it is a federal program.

**AGENDA ITEM #8(c)**  
**MS. SHARON MAZZITELLI- IMPACTS OF ADDICTION ON SW FLORIDA**

Ms. Sharon Mazzitelli, Executive Director of AIM Target Programs Inc., and also a member of the SWFRPC's task force on overdose prevention (STOP), began her presentation by informing everyone that AIM's mission is to contribute to the community by providing compassionate, respectful and outstanding behavioral healthcare and their vision is to lead as well as collaborate with other stakeholders to make a considerable difference in the community. AIM Target started before the Opioid Epidemic began and they are still involved in working to help those impacted by the epidemic. Ms. Mazzitelli discussed substance abuse and overdoses, she shared the statistic that more than 17,000 Americans died in 2017 from overdosing on prescription drugs and street opioids, nearly 200 people die a day from overdoses. At this point

Ms. Mazzitelli had everyone in the room stand up and she went around and had a little more than half the room sit, by doing this she shared that everyone who was sitting had “overdosed,” providing a visual of the impacts of the opioid epidemic impacting quality of life. She continued to explain that addiction does not discriminate, those who are addicted are not just minorities or homeless on the street. Most people who are struggling with opioid addiction began using when their doctors prescribed them pain killers for an injury or other issue. She shared that fentanyl is on the rise and other drugs like cocaine and heroin are being laced with fentanyl which instantly causes an overdose. There are also two new drugs that are being seen, kratom and Tianna. Kratom is natural and comes from Southeast Asia and used to self-medicate, it can be found on the street and the same goes for Tianna, however, it is said that Tianna is more powerful when it comes to the euphoric feeling. Ms. Mazzitelli shares that at AIM there are many parents who are bringing in their children for drug testing, showing that more and more youth are suffering from addiction issues, mostly with opiates. Ms. Mazzitelli concluded her presentation by acknowledging that addiction, drug abuse and overdose is happening everywhere not just in Florida, but we can start here in our community by trying to educate, gain knowledge and work together to fight back against this epidemic. Vice- Mayor Newsom commented that a big problem in Sarasota County is heroin use and it is growing. He went on to ask if heroin is making a big come back and Ms. Mazzitelli stated that it is making a comeback. Vice-Mayor Newsom asked what kind of treatment is available. Ms. Mazzitelli shared that there are many treatment centers and programs available, but it does take a while to get in. She explained that there is also there a need for extended aftercare to avoid relapse or to help immediately when relapse occurs. Extended aftercare is needed for a year or longer in order to be effective. Mr. McCormick asked for Ms. Mazzitelli to comment on the use of detox drinks. She responded by informing that detox drinks can be bought anywhere, and they are mostly used for people who abuse drugs to flush their system fast in order to pass a drug test. Councilman Cummings brought up the rise in youth drug abuse and what he has learned is that the youth are using drugs to self-medicate and mask their real mental health issues. Ms. Mazzitelli agreed and went on to say that there needs to be more attention paid to mental health within communities because when these issues are untreated, they are repeated, and the cycle continues impacting quality of life for all. Dr. Felke shared that FGCU along with 9 other Florida schools are developing a curriculum on mental health/substance abuse to better train future social workers on the issues.

**AGENDA ITEM #9  
ESTERO BAY AGENCY ON BAY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**AGENDA ITEM #9(a)  
APPOINTMENT OF SWFRPC REPRESENTATIVE TO EBABM 2020**

Chair Perry stated that he will have a member appointment ready for the next meeting in March.

**AGENDA ITEM #10  
NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

**AGENDA ITEM #11  
UPDATES**

**AGENDA ITEM #11(f)  
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020**

Ms. Wuerstle reminded everyone that when the budget was adopted for 2020 it was decided was that going forward meetings would be held quarterly. There will be one half-day/mini conference a year, held in September 2020 and the other meetings of the SWFRPC will be short business meetings followed by a presentation on an important issue. The new dates for 2020 meetings following the January meeting are in March, June and September. Ms. Wuerstle stated that after going out to the different county managers and asking what issues are important for the RPC to focus on in order to be more relevant, the feedback received was to focus on water quality, affordable housing, regional transportation, storm resiliency, quality of life and intergovernmental coordination. Ms. Wuerstle asked for input on what everyone would like to see at the March and June meetings. Chair Perry stated that the Executive Council discussed topics and the two that seemed to be at the forefront for them were affordable housing and transportation. Commissioner McDaniel stated that he would like to see water quality and beach nourishment and sea level rise discussed. Mr. McCormick brought to attention that when it comes to affordable housing there seems to be barriers with technical and financial issues involved. Commissioner Shaw stated that one of the things that coincides with affordable housing is skill sets, in order to get people into affordable housing they need jobs and skill sets so they are able to pay their bills and make their mortgage. There are many businesses that are using people to do the work cheaper and ignoring the local populace.

**AGENDA ITEM #11(d)  
INTERSTATE-75 CONNECT PROJECT**

Ms. Wuerstle stated that she had a call and request to meet with the individuals of FDOT. FDOT is currently in the initial stages of this project. They are looking at I-75 issues and what is needed. She has told FDOT that an SWFRPC council meeting would be a great place to come and talk about these issues and their timelines. FDOT indicated that they were planning to reach out to the elected officials to get their input. Ms. Wuerstle asked FDOT if they were planning to do this project at the same time as the M-CORES project and they said yes. Commissioner McDaniel stated that FDOT is hiring a consultant for \$30 million to do a study in Collier and Lee County to tell the counties what they need to do.

**AGENDA ITEM #11(c)  
MULTI-USE CORRIDORS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE (M-CORES)**

Commissioner McDaniel stated that M-CORES is moving along and it is a bureaucratic process set up by the legislature, they set up a year and a half of public input to talk about the potential of a new road going from Polk through to I-75. Currently there are conversations from folks stating all the adverse impacts. Commissioner Storter-Long stated that Glades County is not getting any reports on this from their Commissioners. Commissioner McDaniel stated that once the line on the map is done, he wants to reestablish public input on a local basis, because no one knows best what is going on in southern collier county than those who live there. Ms. Wuerstle announced that the recommendations must be submitted to the legislature by October 2020 and the next meeting of the task force for southwest Florida is February 13, 2020 from 9:30am-4:30pm in Moore Haven. Commissioner Penny Taylor spoke out and said that one of the requests that she made was for the data on I-75, how many times it has been closed, how long it has closed for, and the challenges that are being seen. She said that she has not yet received that data.

Ms. Wuerstle referred to the annual report of the RPC and stated that we are looking to cut costs any way that we can, but still supply information to everyone. The annual report is probably the most cost-effective report ever written to date.

**AGENDA ITEM #11(a)**  
**LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE (LEPC)**

The report was bypassed the sake of time.

**AGENDA ITEM #11(b)**  
**BROWNFIELD COALITION ASSESSMENT GRANT**

The report was bypassed the sake of time.

**AGENDA ITEM #11(e)**  
**CDBG MITIGATION**

Ms. Wuerstle stated that \$633 million is coming from the Federal government to the state, and by Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> the state must submit a report on what they will do with the money. The application will open late summer early fall and they will be looking for big transformative projects.

**AGENDA ITEM #12**  
**STATE AGENCIES COMMENTS/REPORTS**

This item was for informational purposes only.

**AGENDA ITEM #13**  
**COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner McDaniel stated he would like to take a vote and see the Promise Zone Initiative transferred from the SWFRPC to a different organization and he would like that decision to be made in March at the next meeting. Ms. Wuerstle stated that that decision is not up to the RPC it is up to the feds and it is necessary to go through the appropriate steps for that request. Mr. McCormick asked Commissioner McDaniel what his reasoning is for this request and Commissioner McDaniel stated that it is a 10-year initiative and 3 years have gone by and the communities that should've been served by this have not been. He went on to say that in 3 years nothing has been done with the Promise Zone initiative and there are other organization that can manage the initiative better than the RPC. Commissioner McDaniel felt that one of the counties within the Promise Zone should be managing the initiative. Chair Perry stated that if the Promise Zone Initiative is going to be transferred to a different organization it should go somewhere that has the best interest of all people and counties involved. Ms. Wuerstle stated that the new administration gutted the program and the big "hook" was that whenever agencies applied for grants, they would get extra points for having a promise zone. Except for HUD no other agencies give these points. In the beginning there were many promises made that having a promise zone would help to get federal dollars and resources but that is no longer the case, and all of the promise zones across the country are dealing with this issue. Commissioner McDaniel again stated that he would like to see the Promise Zone initiative shifted away from the SWFRPC. Commissioner Penny Taylor stated that when the Promise Zone came to Immokalee it seemed very promising, but she does not remember any dollars every coming in and with a different administration, things have changed quickly and quietly. She went on to say that she would like to have a discussion of this with the other commissioners and the SWFRPC involved to see how this can be moved forward. Commissioner Storter-Long stated that with the funding and the reserves of the RPC declining, the RPC may not be around much longer so it may be a good idea to shift the Promise Zone Initiative to a different organization. Chair Perry stated that he does not feel that he is leaving the organization in a good place and he feels very bad about that but he does feel that the SWFRPC is headed in a positive direction with the things that they are doing.

**AGENDA ITEM #14**  
**ADJOURN**

The next meeting will be on March 19, 2020. The meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

---

Vice-Mayor Michael Atkinson, Secretary

**The meeting was duly advertised in the January 2, 2020 issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 46, Number 01.**