

**MINUTES OF THE
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE BOARD
JANUARY 20, 2022, MEETING**

The meeting of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council Executive Board was held on January 20, 2021, virtually via a zoom meeting. Governor Appointee and Council Chair, Mr. Don McCormick called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. There was a quorum of the Executive Committee present.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilman Jaha Cummings - Treasurer
Mr. Don McCormick - Chair
Mr. Tommy Perry - Governor Appointee

OTHERS BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Commissioner Rick LoCastro - Collier BCC
Commissioner Bill McDaniel - Collier BCC
Mr. Mel Karau - Governor Appointee

EX-OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT

Phil Flood, SFWMD
Jon Iglehart, FDEP

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Keith Robbins, FDOT
Ms. Heather Anckner, Co-Founder/Partner, Rockwood Steel LLC
Ms. Lillie Rentz, Air Glades Airport Manager
Ms. Natlie Hardman,
Ms. Rosemary Fllori, Glades County EDC
Ms. Keitha Daniels, Hendry County EDC
Ms. Margaret Wuerstle- Executive Director, SWFRPC
Ms. Rebekah Harp- SWFRPC
Ms. Tracy Whirls- SWFRPC
Mr. Jim Burch- SWFRPC

AGENDA ITEM #6(b)
MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 18, 2021, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Mr. Tommy Perry offered a motion to accept the minutes of the November 18, 2021, Executive Committee meeting as presented. Commissioner Bill McDaniel seconded the motion to accept the minutes. The action was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #7
FINANCIALS

AGENDA ITEM #7(a)
OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2021 FINANCIALS

Ms. Wuerstle explained that October 1st is the beginning of the fiscal year, and the October/November financials follow the typical financial pattern of prior years. The financials show that the RPC is down approximately \$34,000 in the first month and down \$72,000 in the second month. Ms. Wuerstle explained that it is early in the fiscal year, and the RPC has outstanding receivables yet to come in. She explained that the RPC is hopeful to continue the patterns and close out the fiscal year but will continue to watch it closely. Margaret also wanted to mention that the RPC has started the audit for last year and the auditors have been working with Rebekah to go through the books. Margaret explained that the RPC should have the audit completed early this year.

Councilman Cummings offered a motion to approve the October-November 2021 financials. Mr. Tommy Perry seconded the motion for approval of the October-November 2021 financials. The action was approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM #8(a)
INLAND PORT DISCUSSION

Ms. Whirls introduced herself to the Council and stated that she is working on a contract basis with the RPC as an Economic Disaster Recovery Coordinator. She explained that she has been working with the Economic Development offices from four of the six counties in the RPC region. They formed a Coalition with the Glades region of western Palm Beach County to pursue a Build Back Better grant from EDA to create an inland port system in southern Florida, which would be housed largely in the rural areas of Palm Beach County designed to serve the urban coastal markets of Florida and beyond. Ms. Whirls invited Keith Robbins with FDOT district 1 freight and seaport coordinator servings Polk, Highlands, Okeechobee, Glades, Hendry, Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Sarasota, Hardee, DeSoto and Manatee Counties. Ms. Whirls explained that included in the packet is a presentation on Inland Ports that was presented to the US 27 mobility stakeholders working group in May of 2019. Ms. Whirls also invited Heather Anckner, Co-Founder/Partner of Rockwood Steel LLC, of Jacksonville. Ms. Anckner is the contractor for south central Florida express, which is the railroad that connects Florida east coast rail on the east side of Lake Okeechobee and CSX in Sebring. Before Ms. Anckner established Rockwood,

she led six railroads across eight states and was in charge of business development for a multi-model inland river port facility at the port of Florence Alabama. Ms. Whirls continued to explain that based on the bare shelves in the local grocery stores, the supply chain crisis is not over and from the research she had done, it's not expected to get significantly better absence some major systemic changes before 2023. Ms. Whirls continued to cite the coastal shipping container backup challenges and noted that the supply chain jam is not confined to the shipping industry. The freight issues were switched to air cargo to help alleviate the shipping issues, which created a traffic jam at Chicago's O'Hare airport and caused cargo to be stored in employee parking lots and warehouses. All of this is creating unique opportunities in Florida, as Florida ports were featured on the national news and the Governor encouraged companies to bring their products to Florida. The Florida Governor has proposed an increase in spending to Florida ports to \$117.3 million dollars with the goal of doubling the states port capacity for receiving cargo containers from 4 million to 8 million. This is great news for America's Gateway, which is on 646 acres to be developed as an integrated intermodal logistics center campus with advanced manufacturing.

Ms. Whirls invited Lillie Rentz from Air Glades to talk about exciting things that are happening at Air Glades International Airport. Ms. Whirls explained that Air Glades was featured in the January issue of Southwest Florida Business.

Finally, Ms. Whirls noted that a PB&E study to build a bypass around Bell Glades and South Bay, which is the necessary next step in developing an inland port facility on the east side. The study shows several alternatives to work in conjunction with an intermodal ramp for east coast rail. The study is anticipated to be complete in March by Cambridge Systematics. Meanwhile a separate study by Cambridge Systematics is an update of the Florida Trade and logistics study, which highlights that it is faster to ship to Florida than anywhere else.

Lastly, Ms. Whirls would like to finish up by stating that this is a perfect opportunity for Florida as an on ramp for cargo coming into the United States. There are things can be done on a legislative front for improvements for the ports system and also to the highway and rail to serve this model.

Mr. McCormick asked if there is a Florida Port Authority of any sort. Ms. Whirls explained that there is the Florida Ports Council, which is an Association of the 15 ports in Florida.

Mr. McCormick asks Ms. Whirls if this proposal would take a lot of pressure off US 27 and the other North/South Highway systems in Florida. Ms. Whirls agreed and stated that the bi-partisan infrastructure bill that was passed, has several competitive grant programs that will be available beginning in February. Ms. Whirls explained that the RPC will be looking at those and working with partners among the economic development folks and determine how best to go after those funding opportunities. Ms. Whirls explains that the RPC needs to get the word out to the world that Florida can be an on ramp for product cargo destined for the eastern seaboard or even the mid-west.

Councilman Jaha Cummings stated that he is on the Freight Advisory Committee for FDOT and he explained that during the last meeting there was a discussion on intermodal sites and Southwest Florida was left off of the conversation. He would like to bring this inland port discussion to the next meeting in February to push hard. He explained that the east coast is full, and he believes that the inland port is a solution to the bigger picture of Florida being a major player in terms of trade. Southwest Florida needs to be seen as a solution for the state. Ms. Whirls asks Councilman Cummings to send her the information for the next meeting and she would sit in on the meeting.

Mr. Burch wanted to include that this discussion on inland ports is a great example of getting elected officials from all over the region to come together and collaborate to push for a solution to this national problem.

Ms. Lillie Rentz thanked everyone for the invitation to participate and explained that Air Glades has been seeing a lot of challenges in the air cargo industry, but it is an exciting time as well. Ms. Rentz continued to introduce herself as the Airport Manager for Air Glades International Airport. She explained that Air Glades has been working on a project for over a decade now to develop a commercial air cargo airport within the FAA's privatization partnership program. In a nutshell, it is a supply chain solution for the perishable industry to become a faster fresher concept to bring goods to markets sooner with no disruption to the cold chain and also add shelf life. Ms. Rentz announced that Air Glades signed the largest floral importer and grower in the world, and are working on acquiring remaining contracts needed to get to a financial closing deadline of April this year. Pushing forward Air Glades needs to execute the existing purchase agreement with Hendry County to purchase the airport and privatize it. The intent is to become operational by the end of 2024 with a 24-36 month construction period before the first commercial air freighter lands at Air Glades. All permits have been acquired for the project as well as the selection of operators and the contract with the fuel supplier is currently being finalized. Ms. Rentz continued that this project is a national necessity to bring fresh food and extend shelf life.

**AGENDA ITEM #9
DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Ms. Wuerstle explained that the fiscal year 20-21 audit is underway, and that RPC is working to bring it to the board earlier this year than last year.

Ms. Wuerstle wanted to note that the new Brownfields grant was submitted, and notification of funding should be announced in early spring.

**AGENDA ITEM #9(a)
UPDATE ON CARES ACT – DISASTER RECOVERY & RESILIENCY GUIDE**

Ms. Wuerstle explained that both Jim Burch and Tracy Whirls are working to identify resiliency measures. Tracy was focused on inland ports under the Build Back Better grant that was not

awarded. However, there are still many funding opportunities available that the project can be phased to different funding sources. Ms. Wuerstle explained that the infrastructure bill will be released in February. In addition, Ms. Wuerstle stated that the latest version of the Disaster Recover and Resiliency Guide that Jim has been working on went out to the board for review. Ms. Wuerstle also mentioned that the next NOFO due for the American Rescue Plan is for the Good Jobs Challenge. Ms. Wuerstle explained that the RPC is working with the Southwest Florida Enterprise Center to put together a training program for small business needs as well as implement this Disaster Recovery Guide.

Mr. Burch explained that there were several NOFO's that the Regional Planning Council has been working on and he appreciated all the effort. The guide started with how to reach the small businesses, however during outreach to businesses and distributing surveys, it was determined that the best thing needed was to prepare this guide, especially during the mist of the pandemic. Small businesses can be prepared with a recovery guide as a business model plan. In this guide, there are several different ways to stay strong and be somewhat structurally sound during events, such as a pandemic or a hurricane, there are several ways within a business plan or structure to help mitigate a lot of those problems. Mr. Burch continued to explain that the guide is roughly 60 pages of which half are worksheets and the other half is information to help in different areas to recover.

AGENDA ITEM #9(B)
RESILIENCY STRATEGY FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Ms. Wuerstle also wanted to point out that both Tracy and Jim mentioned various grants that were submitted. She wanted to mention that there is over \$16 million dollars in grants that are pending for various projects. The RPC is actively pursuing implementation of not only the inland ports, but some of the other projects that are needed in the area. One project that was funded is to address food insecurity in the region. An RFP was distributed for a national consultant, however only one proposal was received despite putting it out to thousands. IFAS will fill the role of the consultant and Ms. Wuerstle explained that she will provide updates once the Stakeholders have given recommendations.

Ms. Wuerstle also provided a quick update on the Clewiston Lake front Master Plan project that was awarded through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. The site analysis and market analysis are both complete and several proposals are being developed to bring to the public. Once the proposals are complete, Ms. Wuerstle explained she will bring them to the board for review.

AGENDA ITEM #9(c)
MEETING LOCATION FOR MARCH 17, 2022 MEETING

Ms. Wuerstle explained that she was hopeful for an in-person meeting today, but because of the pandemic the RPC was cautious and moved to a zoom meeting. Ms. Wuerstle is hopeful

that an in-person meeting will happen in March and explained that she will be reaching out to Mr. Flood to request the SFWMD meeting space for the March meeting.

Lastly, Ms. Wuerstle wanted to mention that during the last meeting she asked the board what issues and/or projects were of interest to discuss, and the inland port was one of those issues. One of the other topics brought up was the census, which Ms. Wuerstle is working to identify a speaker on the new census and the impact it will have on this region. Ms. Wuerstle is hopeful that she will have someone identified for the March meeting.

Ms. Wuerstle encouraged everyone to reach out and submit any issues or topics to discuss during future meetings.

**AGENDA ITEM #9
COMMITTEE REPORTS**

No Committee Reports were given

**AGENDA ITEM #9(a)
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

There was no update given.

**AGENDA ITEM #9(b)
QUALITY OF LIFE & SAFETY COMMITTEE**

There was no update given.

**AGENDA ITEM #10
NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

**AGENDA ITEM #11
STATE AGENCIES COMMENTS/REPORTS**

Mr. Iglehart explained that FDEP is swamped with applications and suffering from COVID issues. He explained that if there are any urgent issues to please reach out to him.

Mr. Flood also agreed that the development community has not slowed down and lots of application for permits are being processed. Mr. Flood explained that the Everglades restoration is moving forward, and the Biden administration announced \$1.2 billion in federal funding for the Everglades Restoration, which is very positive to see the federal government step up and keep pace with the states funding.

AGENDA ITEM #12

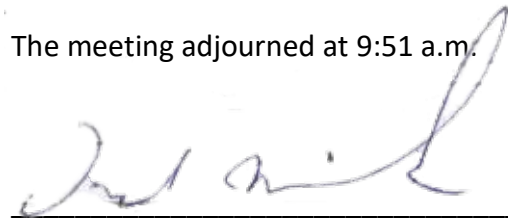
COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner McDaniel requested that an agenda item for organizational structure be added to the next meeting agenda. Ms. Wuerstle ensured Commissioner McDaniel that the item will be added to the next agenda.

Councilman Cummings stated that the meeting was very good and very informative regarding the inland ports.

AGENDA ITEM #13 ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:51 a.m.



Don McCormick, Chairman

The meeting was duly advertised in the January 7, 2022, issue of the FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTER, Volume 48, Number 05.