

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD (EDAB)**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**MAY 14, 2008 - 4:00 P.M.**  
**CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE**  
**100 NORTH ANDREWS AVENUE,**  
**8<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM**

<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Cumulative Attendance 1/08 – 12/08</b>	
		<b>Present</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Gwen Watson, Chair	P	5	0
Ralph Riehl, Vice Chair	P	5	0
Mark Budwig	P	5	0
Cort Neimark (4:20 p.m.)	P	4	1
Patricia DuMont	P	1	1
Tim Schiavone	P	3	2
Kristina Hebert	P	2	3
Adam Sanders	A	3	2
Dev Ramesh Motwani	P	5	0
Mark Krom	A	2	3
Roslind Osgood	P	3	2

**Staff**

Jeff Modarelli, Director, Development Services  
Karen Reese, Economic Development Representative  
Deborah Hernandez, Assistant Community Inspections Manager  
Jorg Hruschka, Building Inspector  
Patricia Smith, Economic Development Secretary III  
Hilda Testa, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

**Guests**

Fred Carlson, South Florida Tourism Council  
Chris Wren, Executive Director, Downtown Development Authority (DDA)  
Elizabeth Veliky, Planning & Design Manager, DDA

**I. Call to Order & Introductions**

Chair Watson called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. and the members in attendance introduced themselves for the record.

**II. Approval of April 9, 2008 Minutes**

**Motion** made by Ms. DuMont, seconded by Vice Chair Riehl, to approve the April 9, 2008 minutes. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

### **III. Downtown Transit Corridor Program**

Mr. Modarelli introduced Chris Wren, Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority.

Mr. Wren introduced Elizabeth Veliky, Planning & Design Manager for the DDA.

Mr. Wren began his presentation for the Board by describing an “at-grade, embedded-in-the-roadway” rail system, which will have a modern, electrified car with overhead wiring. There are approximately 11 stops planned along the route, with a side-stop platform in most locations (possibly a center-of-road platform in some cases). At these platforms there will be an electronic display with scheduling information to let passengers know when the next train is due. Displays at transfer stations may also let riders know when the next connection will arrive, or when the next train along a particular line will arrive. Electronic kiosks showing people how to guide themselves around downtown, or displaying community events, are also planned. The system is intended to be solar-powered, which will ensure it will work in the event of a power outage, and should also save the City in energy costs.

Another component of the project is a “streetscape,” where trees will be added, sidewalks will be widened, and lighting will be improved, on parallel streets as well as along the line where trains will run. Mr. Wren noted that a similar system not only increased rail traffic in Portland, Oregon, for instance, but made pedestrians feel safer walking about the city as well. He also pointed out that new infrastructure and redevelopment downtown will bring a more vibrant look to the area, and will promote reinvestment in the downtown area, along with new businesses.

Mr. Wren told the Board that the new system will be synchronized with existing traffic lights, which will also help unclog traffic between Broward and I-95 and ease congestion in the City during peak hours.

Mr. Wren said this project is one of many steps in building a better downtown, along with building the Performing Arts Center, Riverwalk, and Beachfront Walk. All these endeavors, he said, called for vision from within the community. He believed Florida’s transit system will be the next big project.

Development of this system will depend on many partners, Mr. Wren said. He noted four major advantages to creating a transit system: improved mobility, better quality of life (wider, less crowded sidewalks, for instance), environmental improvements (such as moving away from dependence on fossil fuels with this new, “green” electronic transportation), and economic development. In cities that have rail systems, air quality has improved, and in Portland, upon whose system Fort Lauderdale’s is modeled, some of the city’s more blighted economic districts have sustained great improvement since the rail system has been in place.

Mr. Wren said there have been over 250 meetings to get maximum input on developing the system. The expected route, which will hopefully be the first part of a system that stretches county-wide, will connect people to the financial district, move through Broward to the South, and extend through Flagler Village in the North. An East-West “circulator” line will also be installed to move people around once they’re reached the transit lines.

The DDA and the City Commission, Mr. Wren said, have already endorsed the North-South line he described, and have re-affirmed their commitment to the new system. They have promised a one-time fee of \$10.5 million as part of the local share, or will bond this amount out over 30 years at approximately \$600,000 a year. The next step will be to meet with the County Commission, who have also recently re-affirmed their commitment (after voting in favor of it three years ago). Mr. Wren said this next meeting is expected to take place in late May or in June 2008.

The entire project will cost \$150 million, Mr. Wren said, and as its design meets federal standards, the federal government will pay half of that cost. Much of this will go toward the \$300 billion transit bill each year. Federal support for the project appears to be very strong. Roughly six million dollars has already come in for “streetscape programs,” funding for consultants, and the costs of some of the electronic equipment. The State of Florida is a partner for \$37.5 million, which has already been budgeted for the project in the State Department of Transportation. Both the County and the State see the rail project as an important step toward a transit system for the entire region.

Locally, Mr. Wren said, the remaining \$37.5 million that needs to be raised will come from a partnership program in which the downtown area will be assessed twelve cents per foot for commercial property, five cents per foot for vacant property, and up to \$99 per year for residential property. These fees are intended never to get higher and in fact should become lower as the downtown area grows. The goal is to avoid “overstressing” the downtown community financially.

Mr. Wren described the advantages of a streetcar/rail system over a bus as follows:

- Better rider participation – more fun for people to try out
- Appeals to a broader range of markets – easier to get on and off, sturdier transport, low floors
- More comfortable, convenient, and reliable ride
- Environmentally friendly
- Lower operating costs

When the rail system goes live, Mr. Wren said, the existing trolley system is expected to be redeployed to extend the downtown Beach Connector further, as well as move further into surrounding neighborhoods. A ring of transit will encompass the entire downtown area.

Because the system will be a streetcar rail, and will only extend 18 inches or so downward, construction is expected to be built at a rate of a block a week, which will be minimally disruptive to existing businesses while the rail is being built.

The next steps of development are as follows: plans will be presented to the County later this month, followed by the Federal Transportation Administration, continued community outreach, construction in 2010, and a grand opening planned for in 2012.

Mr. Budwig asked if the cars are intended to run 24/7. Mr. Wren answered that the system was being designed to run 19 ½ hours a day, carrying 8,000 riders (projected by 2030). On opening day, he said, they were hoping for about 13-14 hours and 3,000 riders.

In response to further questions, Mr. Wren addressed the possibility of power outages. In the case of hurricanes or other natural-disaster warnings, the transit system will shut down, not only out of safety concerns but to allow their operators to respond to these emergencies by evacuating or taking family precautions. Because the system is electrical, it would not work in case of a power failure; even in the cases of “solar stops,” the cells would still eventually have to be recharged.

In further discussion of solar stops, Mr. Wren explained that the kiosks with displays of community information can provide directions and/or emergency messages if needed. There will also be an auxiliary fleet of rubber-wheeled cars, which, while less convenient or effective than the rail system, would provide necessary backup.

Ms. DuMont asked if the overhead electrical lines by which the transit system will operate has drawn criticism from those who advocate putting electrical lines underground. Mr. Wren said he hasn't heard very many concerns about this yet, and in terms of the aesthetics of the new system, the planned street trees should draw a lot of attention away from the way an overhead line will look.

It was asked whether the cars would operate on inside or outside lanes. Mr. Wren answered that opinions are divided on this between consultants, who prefer inside lanes for easier exiting, and retailers, who prefer outside lanes for growth in economic development. Currently, he said, as there are no middle-of-the-street platforms, and to encourage the economic aspect of the system, opinion is leaning toward outside lanes.

Mr. Motwani asked if there are plans for additional parking. Mr. Wren answered that they will most likely be working with the Hospital District and Flagler Village to add parking garages in both areas, which will also encourage further economic growth in those areas.

Ms. Hebert asked how bridge openings and closings would be handled. Mr. Wren said all transit models are designed with current lockdown periods in mind, and the DDA is considering a 30-minute extension on the lockdown periods in the morning and evening.

He said this will be discussed with the boating community, however, before any changes will be made.

Ms. DuMont asked how the current volume of traffic will be affected when more lanes are taken away from cars on the road. Mr. Wren said the rails will operate in the same travel lanes as cars, on rails embedded in the asphalt, and cars will follow them in the same way they currently follow buses.

Mr. Carlson wondered if the system's lack of a flexible route, being tied into the rails in the road, would be a problem, and if a vehicle with rubber tires might not allow for more mobility. He also felt that rails might be unsafe for bicyclists or motorcyclists, and if implementing the rail system might not be an unnecessary cost to the City.

Chair Watson asked Mr. Wren how the Board might be of the most help to the rail system. Mr. Wren said a resolution of support would be appreciated, particularly when the system is presented to the FTA. He also asked Board members to let him know if any particular neighborhood or group wanted a presentation on the system.

Ms. DuMont was concerned about how the residents in the Northwest of the City, who were concerned that they might be left out of the transit initiative, might best be supported by the Board. Mr. Wren pointed out that the DDA looked at possible extensions before approaching the City Commission, and both extensions might have potential if they are revisited. He reiterated that the DDA will be there to help, whichever way the community decides to go on the issue.

Dr. Osgood pointed out that although some residents might not live in a part of the City directly affected by the transit system, she felt it was always good for residents of one area to feel connected to what went on in other parts of the City. She said she would be happy for a DDA representative to appear at her church, so people driving in from other areas would get more information about the system. Mr. Wren encouraged Dr. Osgood to get in touch with him regarding this presentation.

In response to a question about a ridership fee, Mr. Wren said the system would be owned and operated by Broward County Transit, so the fare would most likely be comparable with their fees. He said the City Manager was hoping to make it a free system. He also said that the fee would probably be "seamless," meaning if a rider paid a fee on a City bus, that fee would cover the same rider on the transit system as well. Mr. Motwani suggested that parking fees be used to offset the transit system's costs.

**Motion** made by Ms. DuMont, seconded by Mr. Budwig, to support the transit initiative through a Board resolution. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Watson requested that all Board members add the resolution to their list of Goals for Discussion.

#### **IV. Code Enforcement on Interim Construction Aesthetics/Beauty**

Ms. Debbie Hernandez, Assistant Manager for Code Enforcement, was present in lieu of Mr. Michael Maloney, who was unable to attend this Board meeting. Board members were invited to address any questions regarding Code Enforcement, as it affects undeveloped parcels of land, to Ms. Hernandez instead of her giving a lengthy presentation.

Mr. Budwig asked if Code Enforcement was relevant to old, vacant sites around the city, particularly abandoned construction sites. Ms. Hernandez noted that especially with the current state of the “construction boom,” Code Enforcement was aware that these vacant sites were potential problems. She said the Department had come up with a letter, signed by the Building Official (she pointed out that in the case of construction sites, the ultimate authority rests with the Building Official), that is signed by a contractor when he applies for a construction permit. The letter lets the contractor know that he is expected to have a dumpster on the property, to keep the site clean and the streets clear and swept, and to act as a “good neighbor” to surrounding properties. With the letter, she said, that contractor could not later claim he was unaware of the regulations.

Mr. Budwig clarified that he particularly meant vacant or abandoned buildings, not necessarily construction sites. Ms. Hernandez noted that these buildings also fall under Code Enforcement, and the City has been especially active in fighting graffiti.

Mr. Motwani asked if the letter from Code Enforcement was handed out at the time of the building permit or the demolition permit. Ms. Hernandez said that particular letter was intended for building permits, but demolition permits are also Code Enforcement issues, and the Department was actively trying to get the word out that undeveloped parcels of land must be left undisturbed, without exposed soil. She conceded that this has not historically been enforced, but it has recently been incorporated into a checklist for the demolition process so it can be actively enforced in future cases.

Mr. Neimark asked how, and by whom, the construction process is monitored once it has started. Ms. Hernandez reiterated that this is the Building Official’s responsibility, and if that Official addresses violations with contractors, the contractors usually comply. If they do not, the property is in violation and a lien on the property could be the ultimate result. Mr. Neimark continued by asking if the Official could hold up the permit for Code Enforcement violations. Ms. Hernandez said that while this could be a result, that was considered a harsh punishment, and it is rare that the Department needed to take such a drastic step.

Mr. Modarelli asked what department or official would be the one to contact to report a violation. Ms. Hernandez gave the Board at large the General Complaint number, and also offered her own office number in case Board members needed to contact her specifically.

Chair Watson thanked Ms. Hernandez for her time spent addressing the Board.

## **V. EDAB Discussion of Goals**

Before the formal discussion of the Board's Goals began, Mr. Modarelli noted the difference between Advisory Boards and Advisory Committees. While there is a slight difference, he pointed out that both groups fall under the Sunshine Laws. Chair Watson then directed the Board's attention to their Goals for Discussion.

1. Joint venture between the City and the new hotel for parking – Mr. Schiavone reported that the Blackstone Group had not expressed any further plans to build a hotel on the property in question. He stressed that in order for the hotel to be built, the parking garage would need to be built first. At this time, he said, the hotel has been closed for one year. Mr. Schiavone believed the Blackstone Group would probably welcome another corporation's offer to purchase the property from them.
2. Small/Minority-owned business Enterprise outreach seminar – Mr. Modarelli said he would have more information about this at next month's meeting. Chair Watson reminded the Board that at an earlier meeting, they had discussed bringing all the Boards together under one umbrella; she said a "meet-and-greet" had been planned for this purpose on June 26 at 4:00 p.m. at the Chamber Building.
3. Business Capital Improvement Program – the application process will be explained to the Board at the June 11 meeting. A link will be placed on the Economic Development website will link browsers to the BCIP program.
4. Marine Industry Preservation – Ms. Hebert said she would send out an email that would change presentation from the broad category of Working Waterfront to focusing more attention on business retention and expansion. Ms. Hebert said she planned for further details to be included in her email.
5. Signage – Bonnett House is now approved to be open year-round, and they have the necessary visitor traffic to qualify for an FDOT program that would allow them to apply for matching dollars. The plan is now for Bonnett House to receive directional signage, and for additional signage to point people toward Fort Lauderdale Beach.
6. Convention Hotel – Mr. Motwani spoke with the proposed convention hotel today, but as it is still going through additional negotiations, it was not considered appropriate for anyone from this hotel to appear before the Board yet. When funding is also settled, then an update can follow.

7. Interim Construction – Chair Watson said this discussion was not necessary, as Ms. Hernandez had addressed it earlier.
8. Events – Chair Watson said these had already been covered as well.
9. Workforce Housing – Mr. Krom was traveling and not present to bring this topic before the Board.

## **VI. Old/New Business**

An upcoming event in support of new development was announced for May 29 at the Marriott Courtyard; all Board members were invited to attend.

Mr. Schiavone reminded the Board that no air show was scheduled for the beach this year, and he asked that all Board members encourage the City to hold more special events on the beach in conjunction with Parks and Recreation. He said a Fourth of July celebration would attract visitors from neighboring towns and cities, and felt that it was Fort Lauderdale's role to be at the forefront of entertainment in the County.

Mr. Budwig said the Chamber of Commerce has started a new Marine Committee, which was working on bringing back the air show or something similar to it. The Beach Redevelopment Board is also looking into bringing more activities back to the City's beaches. It was suggested that Parks and Recreation could attend an upcoming Board meeting and give their position on their upcoming activities and let the Board know how they could be of any support.

## **VII. Save the Dates**

- June 11 – BCIP Application Process
- August 18 – Better Meetings workshops at RiverWalk Trust – Chair Watson highly recommended that Board members add this date to their schedules

With no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m.