

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

February 19, 2019

LET IT BE REMEMBERED, the Public Transit Advisory Committee in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 3:00 P.M. in REGULAR SESSION at Administrative Building “F”, Third Floor, Collier County Government Complex Naples, Florida with the following members present:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman: Mr. John DiMarco
Vice-Chairman: Mr. John Jenkins
Mr. Arthur Dobberstein
Mr. Harold Weeks
Ms. Sonja Lee Samek

ALSO PRESENT:

Ms. Michelle Arnold, Director, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement
Mr. Omar DeLeon, Senior Planner, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement
Mr. Braian Morales, General Manager, MV Transportation, Inc.
Ms. Brandy Otero, Senior Planner, Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization

I. Call to Order

Chairman DiMarco called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken and a quorum was established.

III. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Jenkins entered a motion to approve the February 19, 2019 meeting agenda. Mr. Weeks seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

a. January 15, 2019 Minutes

Correction to Attendance – Mr. Weeks was in attendance at the January 15, 2019 meeting and was inadvertently left off of the list of attendees on page 1.

Mr. Jenkins entered a motion to approve the January 15, 2019 meeting minutes with the noted correction. Mr. Weeks seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

V. Committee Action

a. New membership for the PTAC

Two applications for Advisory Committee membership have been received for consideration. The applicants have been evaluated based on their potential contribution to the PTAC and upon review, are recommended as eligible for the committee. The applicants were present at the meeting and invited to present their credentials and reasons for interest in committee membership.

Mr. James Caton addressed the Advisory Committee first. Mr. Caton has resided in Collier County for one year, having recently relocated from India after working there for three years. Mr. Caton has a degree in engineering from Cornell University and an MBA from Georgetown University. Mr. Caton is a “smart cities” expert, working as global leader for smart cities at IBM, and then leading efforts in India for the 100 Smart Cities program. He presently works for SAS, a software analytics company based in Raleigh, NC. Mr. Caton’s work in technology for the “Smart Cities” program includes rapid transit and real time tracking, analytics and software for environmental concerns, such as water pollution, as well as video analytics for public safety and crime prevention, etc.

Mr. Caton expressed a desire to share his expertise through participation on the Public Transit Advisory Committee. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to areas of focus which are working well in other parts of the world that may be of benefit to the Collier Transit Division. Mr. Caton stated that based on his research of the materials and prior meeting minutes, the current focus on technology is a proven, safe and reliable avenue to pursue; for example, opportunities for multimodal transport and real time tracking. Mr. Caton identified potential challenges as the demographics/expansive size of Collier County and the ability to attract larger partnering companies.

Mr. Clifford Donenfeld next addressed the Advisory Committee. Mr. Donenfeld has been a resident of Collier County for 15 years and is a full-time resident. Mr. Donenfeld attended Hartwick College in New York, including a term at University of Bristol in England. He has also attended journalism workshops at Ball State University. He is a licensed realtor and real estate broker, working for Coldwell Banker. Mr. Donenfeld is active in the local community with various charitable programs benefitting children, families, and seniors, working with local organizations including Salvation Army, Youth Haven, and nursing homes. He attends Naples Community Church and currently serves as the Vice-Chairman of the Collier County Republican Executive Committee. Mr. Donenfeld was also Creator/Producer and cast member of a local television show, "Billionaires Coast".

Mr. Donenfeld stated that public transportation is financially underserved within the government infrastructure, in view of the needs of the aging population, the disabled, as well as visitors and part-time residents who do not drive and are reliant upon public transit. Mr. Donenfeld noted having lived in New York City and the overall favorable public opinion of public transit there, and suggested a possible media blast, similar to that done in New York City, to positively impact public perception in utilizing public transportation. Access was also noted to be an issue, especially for the elderly or disabled, who have difficulties in bridging the gap in distance to the nearest bus stop.

Mr. Dobberstein inquired if it is acceptable to participate on the Advisory Committee while also being Vice-Chairman of a political party. Ms. Arnold clarified the ordinance does not preclude service on other committees. Mr. Jenkins stated that Committee membership should be non-partisan and further questioned the appropriateness of Mr. Donenfeld's involvement with production and participation in a local television show. Mr. Donenfeld replied that this experience would be an asset to the Advisory Committee in terms of social media and television/advertising blasts, and stated that he wished to advocate for the advancement and promotion of the Public Transportation Division in Collier County. Mr. Weeks expressed his support for Mr. Donenfeld's application for Board membership and stated that his experience, especially in television production, would be an asset to the Advisory Committee in terms of video marketing projects. Mr. DiMarco also expressed his support in favor of Mr. Donenfeld's application and did not note any conflict of interest.

Mr. Jenkins entered a motion to approve the application for membership of the Public Transportation Advisory Committee for Mr. James Caton. Mr. Weeks seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Weeks entered a motion to approve the application for membership of the Public Transportation Advisory Committee for Mr. Clifford Donenfeld. Ms. Samek seconded the motion. The motion was carried by 4-member majority, with 1 abstention by Mr. Jenkins.

Ms. Arnold noted that the two applications for Committee membership would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) for their consideration and recommendation, with any potential conflict of interest issues being vetted by the BCC at that time.

VI. Reports and Presentations

- a. FY19 Transit Workshop** – Ms. Arnold stated that the recently held FY19 Transit Workshop was deemed to be a success. Ms. Arnold wished to express appreciation to Committee members who were in attendance and who participated in the meeting, as well as for the Advisory Committee’s ongoing commitment to ensuring the success of the Transit Division in providing a quality service to the community.

Ms. Arnold stated that contractual details with MV Transportation, Inc., are being finalized through Procurement, with presentation to the BCC at the March 26, 2019 meeting. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to whether the negotiation of lower employee costs was still possible; however, Ms. Arnold doubted the ability to do so, as bids received from other vendors were equal to or higher than that received from MV Transportation, Inc. Further, lower employee costs in the past had resulted in difficulties in hiring quality employees. Mr. Weeks inquired as to the actual benefits derived from utilization of an outside vendor. Ms. Arnold stated that the Corporate commitment of resources and support by MV Transportation, Inc., is anticipated to be of greater benefit than in years past, including an existing relationship with ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to whether contract versus home-grown management has been costed out. Mr. DeLeon stated that a cost comparison was done with LeeTran, a publicly run system, particularly the cost per trip for paratransit, which was substantially higher than that currently paid to the vendor in Collier County. The analysis further showed that despite an increase in vendor contract cost of \$1M over the current contract, the cost to operate publicly was estimated at \$2.7M. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to whether an employee benefit package is included in the vendor contract. Mr. DeLeon stated that employee benefits are included, however the vendor also provides additional employee training programs through their Corporate office, which would require additional staff and associated costs if administered by the County.

Ms. Arnold stated that the advertising policy will be reviewed; currently advertising is permissible inside the buses, including smart cards and voice enunciators, as well as inside the transfer centers. Other jurisdictions with more aggressive advertising policies will be studied, with exploration of all options, such as bus wraps, and the associated costs. Findings will be presented to the Advisory Committee prior to presentation to the BCC in summer 2019.

Mr. Jenkins stated that bus frequency and times should be the more immediate focus in servicing the community. Ms. Arnold stated that the Transit Development update will be done in 2020, which is a 10-year transit plan and involves heavy public input.

In the interim, Transit Staff has been evaluating route planning and reviewing operational analysis to identify improvements which could be made in route frequency, with results to be included in the budget presentation to the BCC. Information gathered from public input will also assist with application for service development grants to enhance the service. Ms. Arnold pointed out that identification of route frequency needs go hand in hand with identification of related funding sources. Mr. Jenkins noted the recently approved fare increases, but without an associated increase in route frequency and times. Ms. Arnold stated there had been an increase in fixed route fares; however, transfer fares had been eliminated and there was no increase in paratransit fares. Thus, the fare changes did not result in an overall increase to the general public. Mr. Jenkins expressed frustration at the ongoing expressed need for revenue and the continued limits in bus service being provided. Ms. Arnold stated that ideas will be presented at the next Advisory Committee meeting as to how routes may be modified for the next fiscal year, taken from the existing Transit Development Plan and operational analysis. Ms. Arnold noted that improvements must be documented in a plan in order to justify funding requests. Ms. Arnold stated that the Advisory Committee will be actively involved in the development of the Transit Development plan, taking into account the current transit plan, as well as additional actionable items which are needed.

Mr. Jenkins stated that there appears to be far more emphasis on budget, than on service to riders. Ms. Brandy Otero stated that the TDP, which is the long-range plan for Transit, is reviewed and revised every five years. The TDP details capital projects, which include service related goals. The document also provides the justification for grant funding requests. Compilation of the TDP is a public involvement activity, including input from a hired consultant, riders, Collier Area Transit, and the bus vendor. Translators are utilized to communicate with riders, if necessary, to solicit as much feedback from the public as possible regarding needs and areas of focus for the next ten years. Ms. Otero stated that focus on service will be at the forefront of this process. Pending receipt of grant funding, a consultant will be hired to begin the process. Collier County is required to have the document completed prior to September 1, 2020 in order to receive the Block Grant. Ms. Otero stated that this process will commence within the next six months. Ms. Arnold noted that periodic updates are done and that two updates have been approved by the Advisory Committee within the past two years, including the identification of priorities within the objectives in the existing TDP. Ms. Arnold stated that the Advisory Committee will be heavily involved in the upcoming TDP update process, with an opportunity to include new items. Ms. Arnold again stated she will bring new service enhancements which will be requested as part of the FY2020 budget to the Advisory Committee for their review.

Mr. Jenkins restated his concern regarding the current service level being offered to the community. Mr. DeLeon stated that the current service level is what may be funded with the current operating budget.

The purpose of the workshop with the BCC was not only to identify funding sources to cover the present deficit, but also to identify funding to provide enhanced service to the community.

VII. Member Comments

+ Mr. Dobberstein stated that he had requested and received a copy of the Advisory Committee mission and guidelines, and suggested each of the members receive and review it as well. Ms. Arnold stated that she will send a copy to each of the Committee members for their review.

+Mr. Weeks stated he had been approached by Mr. Barry Zell regarding the Eagle Scouts working with the Transit Division to construct and/or repair bus shelters as a way to donate their time and for the achievement of a merit badge. Mr. Zell has offered to speak at an upcoming Advisory Committee meeting regarding this initiative. Ms. Arnold notes having worked with the Scouts in the past and is agreeable to doing so again.

+Mr. DiMarco noted his personal experiences with the significant growth and advancements in the Collier Transit system over the years and stressed that improvements take time and money. Further, that Transit presently offers good transportation at a good price for riders. Mr. DiMarco supported the plan to solicit significant public opinion during the TDP process.

+Mr. Weeks concurred that improvements in the system will take time and that riders bear some responsibility within the current system with regard to noting bus times and weather conditions.

+Mr. Jenkins restated his interest in creating a Transit system that works for the people at a cost that is reasonable, and that is functioning well for the city and the people; modifying what exists and making it work.

+Mr. DeLeon inquired of Committee members whether there was a desire to continue meeting in the third floor BCC chambers for future meetings. The general consensus of the Committee was to continue meeting in the third floor room due to the microphones and enhanced sound.

VIII. Public Comments

+Mr. Donenfeld concurred with Mr. Jenkins in that the Transit Division is financially underserved within the County budget and stated that the same funding and attention should be paid to providing quality public transportation for the residents of Collier County as is paid to other endeavors, such as Conservation, noting Collier County leads the State in Conservation land. A desire for greater public accessibility to utilize Transit was emphasized.

IX. Next Meeting Date – March 19, 2019

X. Adjournment

There being no further business for the good of the County, the meeting was adjourned by order of the Chair.

Public Transit Advisory Committee

John DiMarco, Chairman

These minutes approved by the Committee on _____ as presented _____
or as amended_____.