

**REPORT OF THE COUNTY BUDGET TASK FORCE MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2011**

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The County Budget Task Force meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m. on Monday, February 28, 2011, in the Town Council Chambers. On roll call, the following members were found to be present: Mayor Gail Coniglio, Chair, Vice Chair Erica Elliott, Carla Cove, Bobbi Horwich, Bruce McAllister, and Jere Zenko. Cynthia Simonson had submitted her resignation from the Task Force.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Coniglio led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Pat Cooper, 261 Sanford Avenue, asked questions and spoke about issues that should be included in the scope of the Florida Tax Watch (FTW) study. Thomas Bradford, Deputy Town Manager, answered Mr. Cooper's questions saying that Palm Beach Fire-Rescue would be included in the scope of work, and a municipality could not fund the FTW study.

Mayor Coniglio welcomed Carla Cove who had been appointed to the Task Force by Town Council President David Rosow.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Bradford stated that at the last Town Council meeting there was some discussion about the logic of continuing to have the Mayor as the Chair of the County Budget Task Force. Mr. McAllister requested a discussion of this item be added to the agenda as item X.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Mrs. Zenko, seconded by Mr. McAllister, and unanimously approved.

V. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 24, 2011, MEETING

There was consensus to table approval of the minutes of the January 24, 2011, meeting until the next Task Force meeting to allow everyone more time to review them.

VI. APPROVAL OF A TAXPAYER ACTION BOARD (TAB) RECOMMENDED SCOPE OF SERVICES FOR A FLORIDA TAX WATCH STUDY OF THE PALM BEACH COUNTY BUDGET

Fred Scheibl of the Taxpayer Action Board (TAB) stated he, Hal Valeche of the Taxpayer Action Network, and Mr. Bradford had two conference calls with Katie Hayden of Florida Tax Watch. He spoke about the proposals from FTW. He explained that there were three things driving the County budget: 1) a drop in valuation of 5%, 2) increases in personnel service costs, and 3) the American Recovery Act (ARA) and other state and federal grants would no longer be available. He stated that it was decided not to explore these issues until after it was known how the Governor's budget would fare in the legislature. He further stated that the school board was not offered in the FTW scope of work. Mr. Scheibl reported that it was agreed that FTW should take an outside look at TRIM (Truth in Millage) over ten years and the problems with it. He stated that FTW would be willing to take it forward to the Palm Beach County Commission, which would have statewide credibility. He expressed concern with the \$40,000 cost. He suggested that whoever paid for the study should find out how much work would be done for this and/or a less amount of money.

Mayor Coniglio questioned who would pay for the study. She asked Mr. Scheibl how the Task Force would fit in with TAB. Mr. Scheibl responded that TAB is a coalition trying to provide information, analysis and strategy. He explained that when the County budget meetings begin in June, during that process and in the interim, TAB would meet with staff and the County Commissioners and having the Task Force represent the Town would be very important. He advised that TAB would suggest strategy and talking points.

Mr. McAllister stated that to the extent that Mr. Scheibl believes that the Florida Tax Watch study would be useful to TAB in trimming the Palm Beach County budget, the Task Force could ask the residents who are interested in reducing the County budget to support TAB and Florida Tax Watch.

Mrs. Elliott said she felt that the Florida Tax Watch study would be duplicative of what the Economic Council had done five years ago. She said that the Task Force could have a strong voice and the coalition aspect of working with TAB was a powerful relationship and should be pursued.

Mr. McAllister clarified that before trying to raise funds for a Florida Tax Watch study, the scope of work would have to be defined, the costs trimmed, and staff would need to check with the Town Attorney regarding the legality of doing it. He stated that the Task Force could write letters to the Shiny Sheet, spread the word as volunteers to friends and neighbors, and ask the Town Council to pass a resolution requesting donations for the study.

Mrs. Zenko asked Mr. Scheibl about a duplication of TAB findings. Mr. Scheibl responded that FTW could focus on things where there is not. He said that the value of FTW is the additional focus on capital spending, building construction in particular, and that they are independent and would bring a FTW focus on excess in Palm Beach County.

Mayor Coniglio expressed concern on the time available to determine the scope, find the money, complete the task, and be ready by the first of June for budget discussions. Mrs. Zenko agreed with the need to move quickly and offered to write a letter to residents requesting funds for the study. She suggested Mr. Bradford and Mr. McAllister get together on the wording for the letter. There was discussion on the timeline and raising funds. Mayor Coniglio questioned the legality of a commission sending out a letter requesting funds. Mr. Bradford suggested the issue be added to the March 8 agenda for Town Council approval. He also suggested the letter be sent to the Civic Association and Citizen's Association for distribution to their members.

VII. ADOPTION OF A SET OF TASK FORCE RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FOR THE TASK FORCE TO PURSUE FOR THE NEXT YEAR AS REQUESTED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL

Mr. Scheibl reported that the County Commission held their offsite retreat and said they would like to see flat millage. He stated that TAB would comment on their proposals once they are published. He spoke about the items that are driving the budget, negotiations with the County fire-rescue, and bids for an \$800 million burn plant for the Solid Waste Authority. He said that between now and June, TAB wanted to have a position and talking points on all of the issues that groups, like the Task Force, could use to start bringing pressure on the Commissioners as well as the legislative delegation, because a lot of the budget requirements are Tallahassee-based.

Mayor Coniglio stated that there had been discussion regarding the school board, the Palm Beach County Commission, the Sheriff's Department, and the Solid Waste Authority. She asked if it would be better to focus on one budget this year and then next year increase that focus. Mr. Scheibl agreed that the focus of the Task Force was the County budget and it should be the first priority.

Mr. Bradford reminded the members that Resolution No. 55-10 was adopted by the Town Council and created the Task Force. He reported the scope of the Task Force was the County's budget. He stated he believed that it did include the Sheriff's Department. Following discussion, there was general agreement that the focus for this year would be the County budget.

Mr. Bradford proposed the Task Force members develop a list of goals and objectives for the next 6-12 months. Mrs. Elliot stated that the Task Force already has a mission statement. She proposed two action steps: 1) fund raising for a Tax Watch study and 2) coalition with TAB and Fred Scheibl. She further proposed two pieces to broaden the scope for the next year: 1) develop position papers, with the assistance of TAB, that Task Force members can distribute about a particular item, and 2) form public alliances with other towns and municipalities in the County to have a larger and stronger voice. She explained that this would provide more bodies to attend more meetings. She suggested a

schedule could be developed of who's attending County meetings. Mrs. Cove proposed a timeline be developed around the priorities so the scope doesn't get too big and out of hand. Mayor Coniglio commented that most municipalities would not join with the Task Force because they receive a large amount of services and benefits from the County budgets. Mrs. Horwich reported she had met with Muriel Anderson, councilwoman for the Town of Gulf Stream, and she would be interested in assisting and she thought she could bring in Manalapan and Ocean Ridge. Mr. Bradford commented that he could provide access to a list of every elected official in Palm Beach County and homeowner's and civic associations from Palm Beach north to Tequesta.

Mr. Scheibl highlighted the four areas where the Task Force could assist TAB:

- 1) Participate in TAB,
- 2) Establish a presence for the Town at the budget meetings and hearings,
- 3) Represent the Town in meetings with Commissioners and staff, and
- 4) Communicate back to the Council and to the citizens what is being done on their behalf.

Mr. McAllister added write letters to the editor, press releases, and other communication elements.

Mr. McAllister defined the Task Force priorities:

- The Task Force commit itself to continue as a coalition partner of TAB;
- Encourage the raising of funds by others for a Florida Tax Watch study, working in conjunction with TAB;
- Consider the composition and publishing of position papers to formulate specific ideas as to the County budget;
- Encourage the Mayor as the Mayor of Palm Beach, not necessarily as the chairman of this Task Force, to cooperate with other towns and municipalities in the County to join with the Task Force as separate coalition partners with TAB; and
- To act as TAB coalition partners in presentations to the County Commission, be present at meetings, including staff meetings of the County, and to present the positions that TAB will develop.

Mr. Elliott asked about a pay schedule for FTW. Mayor Coniglio proposed the Task Force see how much money is raised, present it to FTW, and design the study from that point. A discussion followed on collection of the money and who would sign the contract with FTW.

Mr. Ned Barnes of the Palm Beach Civic Association stated he would ask his Board if they would endorse the project and agree to collection of the funds but he did not believe they would sign the contract with Florida Tax Watch. Mayor Coniglio said she would discuss the issue with the Town Council on March 9. She stated that raising the funds should not be the top priority of the Task Force. There was consensus to remove the funding raising from the list of priorities.

Mayor Coniglio reviewed the list of priorities:

- 1) Compose position papers in partnership with TAB.
- 2) Publish the position papers as an op ed piece, through the Citizen's Association or the Civic Association.
- 3) The Mayor to cooperate with other municipalities and build partnerships.
- 4) Participate at the future County budget meetings.

Mayor Coniglio reported that the County meetings start in June, there's one in July and some in September. She suggested a list be made of who would be attending the meetings or would be sending a designee to the meeting. Mr. McAllister reported that he would be out of town from the middle of June to the end of September but he would write, talk, and email regarding the issues.

Mr. McAllister asked that the Task Force priorities include encouraging others to raise or give money for Tax Watch.

Motion was made by Mr. McAllister and seconded by Mrs. Elliott to approve the following priorities for the County Budget Task Force:

- 1) Continue the TAB partnership**
- 2) Raise funds for a Florida Tax Watch study with a design by TAB**
- 3) Compose position papers that can be published**
- 4) Mayor to cooperate with other municipalities as a coalition**
- 5) Present together to Palm Beach Commission**
- 6) Participate at County meetings**

Mrs. Zenko questioned who would notify members of the meetings and asked that the notification be computer driven. Mr. Scheibl said he would include the dates on the TAB website and he would notify Mr. Bradford. Mr. Bradford suggested that the meetings dates could be added to future Task Force agendas.

Mrs. Horwich asked that a letter be sent from the Task Force to the town managers of the coastal communities. Mayor Coniglio suggested that once the letter is sent, the Task Force members contact the various town managers and ask for their participation.

Mrs. Zenko asked if a recent editorial in the Palm Beach Post referencing TAB could be added to the Town's website. She said it was important to have a broad distribution of information.

Chair Coniglio called for the vote to approve the priorities for the Task Force.

The motion to approve the priorities of the Task Force was unanimously approved.

Mr. Bradford advised that he believed a page could be created on the Town's website for the Task Force, describing its mission and including items of interest such as letters that explain issues of concern that would fall under the domain of the Task Force.

VIII. MEMBER REPORTS

Mr. McAllister reported he appeared with Mr. Scheibl at a meeting of the Enabling Ordinance Drafting Committee and put forth their strong position with respect to the Inspector General. Mr. Scheibl stated that the Committee was focused on trying to write the Inspector General ordinance. He further stated that the Committee is composed of seven people and the three members with League of Cities were trying to weaken the ordinance. Mr. McAllister asked if the Mayor could talk to the League of Cities about the issue.

Mrs. Horwich reported she had a meeting with the chief financial officer of the school district, Mike Burke, along with School Board Member Jenny Prior Brown and Mayor Coniglio. She distributed a handout of the school district's response to Lowell Levine's letter. A copy was provided for the record. Mrs. Horwich spoke about the distribution of funds to the school district. She stated that the driving issue for the budget is the unions and teachers. She stated that employees do not pay for their individual health insurance and a family of four pays about \$200 per month. She spoke about food service and transportation costs.

Clerk's Note: The next item discussed was Item X, Any Other Matters.

IX. SCHEDULE MEETING FOR MARCH

Mayor Coniglio reported that the next Town Council meeting was scheduled for March 8, which meant the Task Force was on a tight timeframe. She asked Mr. Scheibl to handle the details for the scope of the Florida Tax Watch study, if the funds come to fruition. She said if the funding is not available, Mr. Scheibl would be asked to provide specific information on how to partner with TAB on the position papers and at the Commission budget meetings.

Mrs. Zenko stated she would start immediately on efforts to raise funds for the Florida Tax Watch study. Mr. Bradford advised that any communication regarding the fund raising efforts should be sent through him. Mrs. Elliott suggested that a 527 political action committee (PAC) could be set up under the IRS to collect the funds for the study. Mr. McAllister replied that he was hoping to avoid creating a PAC. There was a brief discussion on who would collect the checks and sign the contract with FTW. Mr. Scheibl stated that he would contact some individuals who may be able to assist with holding the funds.

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There was agreement to schedule the next meeting for Wednesday, April 6, 2011, at 11:00 a.m. *Clerk's Note: Due to a scheduling conflict, the meeting was rescheduled for Wednesday, March 30, 2011, at 2:30 p.m.*

X. ANY OTHER MATTERS

Mayor Coniglio stated that the Town Council gave a potential direction that she could work on a parallel path to the Task Force at which point the Chair and Vice Chair would be voted on by the Task members. She said she believed that with the timeline that was available, she would be more effective participating with the Task Force than separating out and trying to move on parallel paths. The Task Force members concurred.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the County Budget Task Force meeting of February 28, 2011, was adjourned at 1:34 p.m.

APPROVED:


Gail L. Coniglio
Mayor