

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORKSHOP OF
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

APRIL 15, 2021

Present: Commissioner Robert D. Bender, Chairman, District 4
Commissioner Jeffrey W. Bergosh, Vice Chairman, District 1
Commissioner Steven L. Barry, District 5
Commissioner Lumon J. May, District 3
Commissioner Douglas B. Underhill, District 2
Honorable Pam Childers, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Janice Gilley, County Administrator
Alison Rogers, County Attorney
Anthony Bowens, Administrative Assistant, County Administrator's Office
DeLana Allen-Busbee, Administrative Specialist, Clerk and Comptroller's Office
Shamara Jernigan, Agenda Program Coordinator, County Administrator's Office

Location: Ernie Lee Magaha Government Building, Board Chambers, First Floor
221 Palafox Place, Pensacola, Florida

Report prepared by: DeLana Allen-Busbee

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Chairman Bender called the Committee of the Whole (C/W) Workshop to order at 9:03 a.m.

2. Was the Meeting Properly Advertised?

The C/W was advised by DeLana Allen-Busbee, Administrative Specialist, Clerk and Comptroller's Office, that the meeting was advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on April 10, 2021, in the Board's weekly meeting schedule.

3. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Commissioner Barry led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Board Items

I. Funding Increase to the Pensacola Bay Center for Fiscal Year 2021

A. Board Discussion – The C/W heard a presentation by Tony Cima, Senior Vice President of Operations for the Stadium, Arena, and Theater Division of ASM Global, and the C/W:

(1) Heard comments from Mr. Cima including:

- A synopsis of the timeline of issues faced by the Bay Center due to COVID-19 and Hurricane Sally
- Steps taken by ASM and the Bay Center to address funding issues, including cutting costs and reducing staff/furloughing employees
- The worst-case scenario of funding options needed, which were provided to the County and the target number of \$350,000 based on advice from the County

(2) Heard comments from Commissioner Bender concerning his support of the Bay Center and what it adds to the community, both for the events held and as an emergency shelter, as well as his concerns over its profitability long-term and the management of funds during the pandemic;

(3) In response to inquiry from Commissioner Bender, was advised by Mr. Cima that approximately 75% of ASM's venues operate at a loss; further advised of the information put out by ASM to managers regarding navigating issues with the pandemic;

(4) Heard comments of concern from Commissioner Underhill over the Bay Center's furlough plan and the types of workers affected by the furloughs as they show exactly "who lost how much"; heard additional comments regarding concerns that, unlike many local small businesses, the Bay Center did not make the hard decisions that would cost the decision makers personally and was advised that he was unable to support any additional funding;

(5) Heard comments from Commissioner Bergosh regarding his support of the Bay Center as a community asset, the need to modernize the facility, his understanding of the effect of the pandemic on the Bay Center, while acknowledging struggles the facility was having prior, and his support of providing funding to keep the facility afloat with the provision that funding could be clawed back if money was received from other sources;

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AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

I. Continued...

A. Continued...

- (6) Was advised by Commissioner Bender that he supports fronting the money from Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue until funding comes in from the Rescue Plan, but would like to see money returned if things go better than expected at the Bay Center;
- (7) Heard comments from Commissioner May regarding his support of the Bay Center, his concerns over blue collar workers being furloughed, and inquiry regarding whether the Bay Center was eligible to apply for other funding sources;
- (8) Upon further inquiry from Commissioner Barry, extensively discussed whether the Bay Center could have applied for federal funding, what aid ASM provided to venues regarding this process, why the Bay Center did not apply, and whether the current funding request would still require furloughs;
- (9) Heard encouragement from the Board for the Bay Center to apply for shuttered venue funds as well as any other funding sources available;
- (10) Heard direction from the majority of the Board to provide \$250,000 in funding (in addition to the \$100,000 already provided at the March 25th BCC Meeting) fronted from TDT revenue with instructions to replenish the TDT from American Rescue Plan funds and for the Bay Center to return funds if there is money secured elsewhere;
- (11) Heard comments from Commissioner Barry regarding his concerns over which employees were affected by the furloughs and reiterated that the Bay Center should be aggressive in pursuing other funding sources;
- (12) Agreed to support the Bay Center opening back up to 75% capacity on May 1st and, after data is reviewed, will evaluate opening at 100% in the near future; and
- (13) Discussed the expectation that the Bay Center would return funds if the financial performance was better than expected; and

B. Board Direction – None.

Speaker(s):

Cyndee Pennington

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

II. Pensacola Bay Center Multi-Use Sports and Event Venue Public/Private Partnership Responses

A. Board Discussion – The C/W:

- (1) Was advised by Commissioner Bender that an RFP (Request for Proposals) went out almost one year ago related to potential public/private partnerships for a Pensacola Bay Center Multi-Use Sports and Event Venue and he would like feedback from the other commissioners regarding whether they would like to have the discussion in light of the current situation with COVID-19 and the improvements that have been made to the Bay Center for the Sunbelt Basketball Conference;
- (2) Heard comments from Commissioner Barry regarding his request to have staff find out whether New Market Tax Credits would be available for the project;
- (3) Heard comments from Commissioner May concerning his support of a separate sports arena and remodeling the Bay Center, and was advised that he would only support the project if other funding was brought forward;
- (4) Heard comments from Commissioner Underhill regarding the Bay Center's lack of both flexibility and ability to cater to diverse entertainment, and his concerns that the current facility does not reflect the way masses recreate; heard further comments regarding the need to prioritize other core business practices;
- (5) Was advised by Commissioner Bergosh that he recognizes issues with the Bay Center, but believes that it can be fixed and remodeled to be used for another 20-25 years; further advised that perhaps some of the funds from the collection of the 5th cent for Tourist Development Tax could be used, but he does not feel that now is the time for the conversation due to the pandemic;
- (6) Heard comments from Commissioner May concerning the need for partners at the table and for the project to become part of the overall downtown development plan;
- (7) Was advised by Commissioner Barry that there is a market for sports and youth activities and he sees the value to a holistic community to have an arena for public use, but it would have to be able to work without any use of Local Option Sales Tax funds; and
- (8) Agreed to take no further action and not move forward with the RFP at this time; and

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AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

II. Continued...

B. Board Direction – None.

5. Adjourn

Chairman Bender declared the C/W Workshop adjourned at 10:38 a.m.