

JOINT MEETING
POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LAKE WALES CITY COMMISSION
LAKE WALES COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CRA)

March 12, 2024

Meeting Minutes

(DRAFT)

County Commission Members Present: Neil Combee, Martha Santiago, Rick Wilson, George Lindsey, Bill Braswell

County Attorney: Randy Mink

City of Lake Wales City Commission/CRA Members Present: Mayor Jack Hilligoss, Deputy Mayor/CRA Chair Robin Gibson, Danny Krueger, Keith Thompson

City of Lake Wales City Commission/CRA Members Absent: Daniel Williams

City Attorney: Albert C. Galloway, Jr.,

The meeting was called to order by Polk County Commission Chair Bill Braswell at approximately 10:00 a.m.

COUNTY PRESENTATION

Randy Mink, County Attorney, stated the County's position and said that regarding the proposed CRA expansion by the Lake Wales CRA the area fails to meet the criteria for slum and blight. The area doubles the size of the current CRA. Over 80% of the property has been undeveloped. The expansion requires approval from the Polk County Board of County Commissioners and the County has other plans for those funds. The proposal is actually creating a new CRA area. This would result in millions of dollars in lost revenue for the county which will need to provide county services to the new developments coming in.

CITY PRESENTATION

Albert Galloway, Jr., City Attorney, stated the position of the City of Lake Wales Commission and CRA. He said this will address the blight in the area as found by a recent Finding of Necessity Study of the area. The City Commission recently adopted Resolution 2024-01 to approve the expansion and development of the area. The actions were taken in compliance with F.S. 163.410 which provides that its provisions do not

affect any CRA actions established prior to a County adopting its Charter. The CRA was established in December of 1985, the County's Home Rule Charter was adopted in January 1991. The Home Rule Charter does not affect the Lake Wales CRA actions including amending the plan and expansion of the CRA boundaries. The County asserts that its policy is controlling and objects to the expansion of the CRA area. Lake Wales does not acquiesce in its position. The City and the CRA are cooperating in this dispute resolution process although we do not believe a dispute actually exists in light of F.S. 163.410. The City and CRA want to work together with the County for the mutual benefit of all its citizens.

COMMENTS FROM THE POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Combee said it gets old when a City essentially turns their whole city into a CRA. He said that creating a CRA shifts costs and burdens to the rest of the County to provide county services such as public safety to the area.

Commissioner Santiago said that the proposed area is not a blighted area. Most of it is undeveloped. The County will have to provide services to the area. This is not really an expansion but the creation of a new CRA.

Commissioner Wilson said he has had it with CRAs and what some do. It is not a blighted area.

Commissioner Lindsey said that this is a perversion of what a CRA is intended to address. They want to capture 150% of the taxable value

Commission Chair Braswell said he echoes what has been said.

COMMENTS FROM THE LAKE WALES CITY COMMISSION AND THE LAKE WALES CRA

Deputy Mayor and Chair of the CRA Robin Gibson said the question is whether or not the County can prevent the CRA from the proposed expansion. The CRA was created before the County's home rule charter was adopted. The charter does not affect the operation of the Lake Wales CRA. We are grandfathered in. We want to work with the County. A joint effort was discussed and would be revolutionary. We would like to help the areas in bad need of help. They are in just as much the County's responsibility. Everything is in the County. The CRA wants to help those in bad need which are our joint constituents.

Commissioner Krueger said that the language in the statute is clear. This is about money which is accurate. If we think long-term all that money eventually flows back to the County.

Mayor Hillgoss thanked the County Commission for their hard work. He hopes this can be resolved amicably and no hard feelings however this comes out.

County Commissioner Combee said if they removed the undeveloped section, they wouldn't have a problem.

DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE AGREEMENT OR MEDIATION

County Commissioner Braswell asked if everyone agreed that the next step is mediation. There was consensus on this from everyone.

Randy Mink said he and Commissioner Braswell or his designee will represent the County and Mr. Galloway and James Slaton or his designee will represent the City. There was consensus on this.

Lake Wales Commissioner Thompson asked if the mediation is binding. Mr. Mink said no this is the first step before we go to court.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m.