

## **Glades Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC)**

**Meeting of November 21, 2002**

**9:30 – 11:00 a.m.**

**Belle Glade City Hall – Commission Chambers**

### **Minutes**

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#### **Present at the meeting:**

Duane Gainer, P.B.C. PZ&B, Planning Division  
Caroline Tompkins-Blell, Glades Community Development Corp. (GCDC)  
Steve Cramer, Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Kelly Johnson, Glades Initiative  
Andrea Stephenson, Glades Initiative  
Raoul Pierre-Louis, Business Loan Fund (Representative for John Brown)  
Denny Abbott, P.B.C. Workforce Alliance  
Kay Zaccagnino, P.B.C. School District

#### **Absent:**

Lori Hart, The EDGE Center  
Wendell (Bil) Phillips, P.B.C. Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Doug Chozianin, Construction Arts Associates  
Douglas Green, Workforce Development Center  
Barbara Spence, City of Belle Glade  
Felicia Everett, City of South Bay  
Tammy Moore, South Florida Water Management District  
Pam Nolan, P.B.C. Economic Development Office  
Alice Thompson, Pahokee Chamber of Commerce  
June Howard, EDGE Center  
Theresa Newton, USDA Rural Development  
Lelia Menefee, Workforce Development Center  
Michael Sklar, P.B.C. Housing and Community Development  
Sue A. Bailey, Commissioner Tony Masilotti's Office  
Henry Bittaker and Carolyn Williams, South Florida Water Management District  
Dan Brown, Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Jerry Brownlee, Palm Beach County Library Department  
Sandra Chamblee, The Glades Health Survey  
Helen B. Franke, Palm Beach Community College  
George E. Gadson, Florida Atlantic University  
Remar Harvin, Palm Beach County Housing and Community Development

**Absent: (Cont'd)**

Clayton Hutcheson, Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service  
Carol Ann Huysse, Housing Partnership  
Gwendolyn Johnson, School District of Palm Beach County  
Chris Jones, Palm Beach County Department of Public Affairs  
Arthur Kirstein, IV, P.B.C. Cooperative Extension  
Ken Montgomery, Workforce Development Board  
Autrie Moore-Williams, Glades Community Development Corporation  
Angela Morlok, Palm Beach County Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Curt Thompson, Army Corps of Engineers  
Greg Vaday, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council  
Leigh Woodham, Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center,  
Palm Beach Community College

**Welcome and Introduction**

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. Duane Gainer welcomed those present. He apologized for any inconvenience for the change of the meeting room from the regular location. Mr. Gainer stated he received an email from Alice Thompson, Representative for the Pahokee Chamber of Commerce, informing him that she could not attend the meeting because of the Grassy Waters Festival. She also informed Mr. Gainer that the new City Manager of Pahokee, Jim Smith, began on Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup> and has been obviously swamped. She hoped to meet with him in the next few weeks. She asked me to include him on the GTAC mailing list. Mr. Gainer requested anyone speaking to announce their name for the record before giving comments.

Mr. Gainer reviewed the October 31, 2002 minutes with the group. He informed Ms. Tompkins that on page 2, paragraph 4 he was not sure about the bid prices for the Belle Glade City Hall. Ms. Tompkins responded that the prices listed were OK. He asked the group for any corrections or comments to the minutes. No one had any corrections or comments. Mr. Gainer asked for a motion to accept the October 31<sup>st</sup> minutes. The motion was put forth and seconded, approving the minutes.

**Review and Discussion of Committee Role and Tasks**

Mr. Gainer proceeded by repeating a concern mentioned, at the last meeting, regarding FCAT Testing causing students to graduate with a certificate; not a Diploma. In regards to this, he introduced Kay Zaccagnino with the School District. She agreed to attend today's meeting and respond to any questions.

Ms. Kay Zaccagnino commented regarding Caroline Tompkins-Blell's concern about the FCAT Testing scores and students receiving a Certificate of Completion or Certificate of Attendance. She informed the group that although a

student may pass all graduation courses; without passing the FCAT and without having a GED, they will not be eligible to attend a community college or a technical education school. In addition, the student cannot qualify for scholarships. Ms. Zaccagnino stated that she is not in favor of the FCAT exam. The test is holding our children back tremendously. She included the (HSCT) High School Competency Test. This test means that you have learned everything you need to know from grades 1 through 12. She stated that the FCAT Test is for the same purpose. This is very unfair. She feels that we need to, as a group, lobby against FCAT. The rural areas, not just the Glades, are suffering. The students are not passing, not graduating, drop out rates are increasing, and the levels of frustration in the schools are being shown through violent incidents. Someone needs to speak out to the government stating this is enough. She does believe that it is necessary to have some sort of accountability and standards in the school, FCAT may be the test, but the students should not be penalized for not having passing scores.

Andrea Stephenson inquired what happens with those same students if they were allowed or permitted to go on to a community college; then to a four- year college. What happens when it is time to pass the test for the HSCT or SAT? The point is that the pressure of passing tests is a revolving cycle. It begins long before they begin to take the FCAT or HSCT Tests. The students are aware that they have several opportunities to try and pass the exams. Ms. Stephenson asked where do you draw the line? Ms. Zaccagnino responded that she wished she could answer the question efficiently, but she feels that the FCAT standards are too high. It is obvious because the kids are not passing the test. The test is very culturally inappropriate. There is a negative impact in the Glades area. In any impoverished area there is a negative impact. Other kids have advantages that these kids do not have. Funding is available, access to computers in the schools, and tutoring is available; but the kids don't seem to be taking advantage of these things for whatever reasons. We are looking at kids that maybe taking care of siblings, cooking and cleaning, and trying to perform in an environment that's not conducive to education. The kids that pass are very exceptional kids. A lot of the kids get caught in between the cracks, and we need to do something about it. The kids are not performing up to standards and we need to figure out why!

Caroline Tompkins-Blell stated the bar is set because of the over whelming support for the Governor this past election, and his platform for education. She inquired whom would she contact about the number of students in the Palm Beach County School District graduating without a diploma this year. She also inquired what is available to encourage those students to keep trying for a GED. She also inquired what else is available for students with a Certificate of Completion, other than Job Corps? She stated that there is a tremendous dissatisfaction with Job Corps results and what it is doing for kids. She also stated that we are aware of where the crisis areas are, as far as failing schools, therefore we need to look at doing something in those areas.

Andrea Stephenson, Glades Initiative, stated that she feels the crisis with the students failing the FCAT or HSCT exams does not begin at 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The crisis begins when the child is in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grades. She mentioned a particular situation where a child was not getting good grades because he could not see the blackboard to copy the homework correctly. Another situation is where a child may be absent from school because of health reasons and not able to see a Doctor. There may be an issue of a parent not having appropriate health coverage.

Ms. Tompkins-Blell stated that first we need to look at why the students are not passing the FCAT Test. Last year several students passed the test; then the bar was raised again and it was made retroactive, therefore it caused those students to fail the test. She asked how fair was this!

Mr. Gainer intervened by stating that Ms. Zaccagnino came prepared to answer what exactly a certificate of completion had to offer a student. Ms. Zaccagnino responded nothing except to get a GED. Students could return to school during the summer, which the school offers another opportunity to take the test. The students have at least three (3) opportunities during their senior year to take the test.

Ms. Tompkins-Blell stated that she had contacted the community college and was told that you needed to be a high school graduate or have a GED to attend the college. Ms. Zaccagnino stated that there are three different areas of graduation: 1) certificate of completion; 2) certification of attendance; and 3) diploma – successfully completed courses and FCAT Test. She questioned if there may be confusion between a Certificate of Completion, and Certificate of Attendance. She will look into this issue.

Denny Abbott inquired about the percentage(s) of students in the Glades that are passing. Ms. Zaccagnino responded approximately 55% in High School. He asked how many students are in high school. There are approximately 1,300 students in the Glades; but how many are seniors she does not know. She estimated approximately 250 to 500 students that are not passing. She will report figures at next meeting.

Mr. Gainer asked the group if anyone was aware of any intervention programs to tutor students for the FCAT or GED Test. Ms. Zaccagnino stated that in the past there were churches that held classes tutoring students for GED.

Someone (female) inquired what happens when a student already has acquired a Certificate of Completion from High School. Once the student has graduated, they may not be interested or feel comfortable coming back to the High School to take the test again. Maybe if the test was offered at another location, the student may be interested or feel more comfortable with taking the test again. Mr. Gainer

inquired if a person would qualify for the military with a Certificate of Completion or a Certificate of Attendance. Ms. Zaccagnino responded yes.

Ms. Tompkins-Blell stated she is not in favor of lowering standards. She doesn't feel the FCAT or any other test is too hard for any child to pass, provided they have been learning all along through high school. However, at this time, we have kids that are failing and what do we do about it! Ms. Zaccagnino responded what will happen to the kids that are interested in going to college that cannot pass the test. She also responded that she honestly believes that there are kids that cannot pass the test because of the high level of standards. She mentioned that she took the exam and failed and she considers herself to be smart. She feels that the students that are not passing the test are feeling less confident and it 's lowering their self-esteem.

Someone (female) inquired about what types of work training programs are available to these students. Denny Abbott responded he did not know. He is not the manager of the program and has very little relationship with the program to know what is going on. Maybe the question should be addressed to Lelia Minefee, Manager, Workforce Development, Belle Glade. He believes that at one time the training dollars had been exhausted.

Mr. Gainer intervened by stating this could create a gray area. Normally, with JTPA, the major qualification is income. Also a qualification would be called barriers to employment, which is a high school drop out. A Certificate of Completion or a Certificate of Attendance technically may not be considered a drop out. Mr. Gainer reverted back to Ms. Tompkins-Blell's question regarding what path could the GTAC Committee take in dealing with some of the issues with the Glades schools. There are some students that would like to go to work and some would like to pursue higher education. Some students feel that it is easier to achieve a GED than to focus on passing the FCAT. So they automatically set their goals toward a GED.

Ms. Tompkins-Blell gave a brief history of what was happening in the Glades educationally. At one point, there was a push to employ the youth in the Glades. The strategy was to lower the standards to allow the kids to enter in the job training programs to provide or develop skills, and that would help them to progress. Eighty percent (80%) of those kids had to be terminated from the training program because they could not successfully complete the training program.

Ms. Stephenson reviewed programs designed to enhance reading skills. She feels action needs to be taken long before it gets to be a problem. We have 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders that will be kept back this year.

Mr. Gainer suggested that GTAC members communicate with co-workers, and other agencies to express the concerns of education in the Glades and join

forces with the GTAC Committee. Mr. Gainer explained what a holistic program is to the group and how it should address the different ethnic groups and every day issues. He stated it is important for the group to have short-term goals, such as assisting the students graduating in 2003; and long-term goals for students just starting school. The GTAC Committee needs to have enough member participation in order to form various sub-committees such as, an education committee, jobs committee, health committee, etc.

Mr. Gainer asked Raoul Pierre-Louis if he had any comments. Mr. Pierre-Louis stated that he was listening to a radio station and it was mentioned that Florida High Schools have the highest student dropout rates. He feels the problem is not only with the Glades, poor people, and immigrant workers. It may be that the schools are not doing their work. Discussion ensued regarding the person that represents the Glades District on the School Board's panel. It was stated that the Glades is split between two (2) Board members and this could be an advantage or disadvantage.

Mr. Gainer thanked Ms. Kay Zaccagnino for attending and speaking to the group. He will be talking with her more during the upcoming meetings.

### **Participant Updates and Comments**

Caroline Tompkins-Blell, Glades Community Development Corp. (GCDC) reported on the following:

- The Coalition for Black Student Achievement is holding a major educational seminar on January 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003. The Guest Speakers are Mr. Kilpatrick, Mayor of Detroit; and the Superintendent from North Carolina.
- The contract was signed for Asbestos Abatement to begin early December.
- Meetings have been held with the Urban League to set-up a satellite office located within GCDC. Some of the programs on the east coast of the County that are currently operating and operating well, hopefully will be offered in the Glades. She is lobbying assistance to develop programs for the kids in the Glades.

Steve Cramer, Metropolitan Planning Organization, reported on the following:

- They held a tourist training on last week with tourist training experts. He distributed copies of the power point presentation. The training involved taking a steamed locomotive and refurbishing it to have a tourist train looped around the southern part of the lake. The train will be available

during the day and weekends, and can be used for dinner trains, museums, etc. If successful, the train will go from Ft. Pierce to Sebring.

Mr. Gainer inquired about the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail. Mr. Cramer stated he would give an update at the next meeting.

Andrea Stephenson, Glades Initiative, reported on the following:

- They have completed the Strategic Planning. She stated that part of Glades Initiative's goal is to bring together various agencies interested in collaborating and working together to improve health and living conditions to residents in the Glades.
- A project recently being developed is the Insurance Assistance Program. She mentioned that there are numerous programs available to pharmaceutical companies where they are required to donate free medicine. There is an application and qualification process to participate in the program. Senior citizens can apply.
- Another program available provided by American Optometrist Association for free vision screening.
- The Glades Initiative Newsletter was just recently mailed. If anyone would like to be placed on the newsletter mailing list, please contact her.

Raoul Pierre-Louis, Business Loan Fund (Representative for John Brown) reported that they have been trying to work with GCDC as partners with youth programs. He mentioned kids that are dropping out of school around the age of sixteen (16) years old need to be addressed. He mentioned they have funds available to assist the youth with starting a business. The group engaged in a discussion about how to market the program to students and residents in the Glades.

Ms. Zaccagnino suggested that GTAC develop a list of all the programs available to assist high school students on all graduation levels. Discussion ensued regarding what the list should entail.

Mr. Gainer reported that the Glades Tier Policy Development as been re-assigned to another section within the Planning Division. He feels that GTAC will still have some involvement with the Glades Tier.

Mr. Gainer mentioned regarding the next GTAC Meeting that the County is acknowledging the Christmas Holiday on December 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>. He asked the group for suggestions on the date for having the next meeting. The group agreed that the next meeting date would be on January 23, 2003. Mr. Gainer agreed to meet with Ms. Tompkins-Blell on December 19<sup>th</sup>. She will provide him

with information regarding The Coalition for Black Student Achievement Summit and any other items.

Mr. Gainer stated that the group needs to select a chairperson for future GTAC meetings.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am.

Next meeting is on January 23, 2003 at 9:30 am.

Minutes prepared by:

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Duane R. Gainer, Senior Planner

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