



Board of Directors Meeting

June 13, 2013

Media Items

Item VI.J.

Pinellas considers special taxing districts for poor neighborhoods

Anna M. Phillips, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/pinellas-considers-special-taxing-districts-for-poor-neighborhoods/2122826>

Friday, May 24, 2013 1:22pm

Encouraged by nascent plans for a special taxing district south of downtown St. Petersburg, the Pinellas County Commission is considering using the same method of stoking development in four other low-income areas of the county.

East Tarpon Springs, North Greenwood, Highpoint, parts of Lealman, and neighborhoods south and west of downtown St. Petersburg have all been identified in a county report as trouble spots. Poverty rates are high in these areas, foreclosures are common, and what's potentially more troubling: These low-income neighborhoods are growing.

St. Petersburg officials are hoping to encourage urban renewal in those areas by establishing a Community Redevelopment Area, a step in allowing them to set up a special taxing district. If and when property values rise inside that district, which will be known as the South St. Petersburg CRA, the city would be able to spend the tax revenues on capital projects such as lighting and sewer improvements, or buying vacant land.

At first, city officials only looked into creating a taxing district for the Midtown area, said Rick Smith, who oversees the city's various CRAs. But local elected officials and a group of activists known as Agenda 2010 persuaded the city to widen the zone's boundaries. Current proposals show it extending from Second Avenue N to 30th Avenue S. On the west it would be bounded by 49th Street and on the east by Fourth Street.

At just over 7.5 square miles, that area is home to about 34,000 people and a foreclosure rate that is, on average, about 15 percent higher than in the rest of the city, Smith said.

Inside, the city is proposing to establish two taxing districts: one skinny commercial corridor running along 34th Street and another district surrounding businesses in the Melrose-Mercy neighborhood. Tax revenues from these areas would not go to the city or the county, but into a trust fund that can be spent only on projects inside those zones.

If other CRAs in the city are any indicator, it could be years before the districts generate money for capital projects, Smith said. For every \$1 million increase in property values, the redevelopment trust fund would get only about \$11,000, he estimated.

The county has created 22 of these redevelopment areas since 1977 — three have since expired — in 11 cities. But the South St. Petersburg CRA, which is likely to get approval from both the city and the county commission, is the first one focused on an area that is not part of a city's core downtown.

"Are we prepared do this in the other four areas? My opinion is we should," said Commissioner Ken Welch at a recent board meeting. "This is another tool in the tool kit."

Other commissioners said they would need to see how setting up more redevelopment areas would affect the county's tax revenues before endorsing the idea.

St. Petersburg officials plan to ask the City Council to approve the redevelopment area June 20, and then take their plans to the county in early July. County officials have yet to discuss setting up CRAs with the other cities that overlap with the four low-income areas, said County Administrator Bob LaSala.

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Pinellas considers special taxing districts for poor neighborhoods 05/24/13 [Last modified: Friday, May 24, 2013 4:20pm]

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Lew Williams Project prepares for fall opening

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/lew-williams-project-prepares-for-fall-opening/2122462>

Cara Fitzpatrick, Times Staff Writer

Wednesday, May 22, 2013 3:11pm

The Pinellas County School District is getting ready to open the new Lew Williams Center for Early Learning in the 2013/14 school year.

The center, which will target children ages 1 to 4, is to open at PTEC St. Petersburg. The School Board approved Tuesday a new job description for an administrator - executive program manager - to oversee the center's daily operations. That job will need to be filled soon. District officials are submitting an application to the Department of Health in Pinellas County for a license to open. (The health department oversees childcare centers.) And renovations at PTEC St. Petersburg are expected to start June 1 and finish in mid-August.

The Lew Williams Project, as the district calls it, is an early childhood initiative named for board member Lew Williams who died unexpectedly in 2011. Williams, who owned a daycare, was passionate about early childhood education.

District officials had hoped to get into the early childhood business not only with the Lew Williams Project but by running the county's federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs. But the school district's bid to run Head Start was denied. That hasn't stopped it from pushing ahead with the Lew Williams Project.

[Last modified: Wednesday, May 22, 2013 3:25pm]

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New leader picked to head Hillsborough Children's Board

Bill Varian, Times Staff Writer

<http://blogs.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/new-leader-picked-to-head-hillsborough-childrens-board/2120388>

Friday, May 10, 2013 8:12pm

TAMPA — The Children's Board of Hillsborough County has tapped the head of Alabama's Department of Child Abuse Prevention to lead the organization that provides money to nonprofits that promote child welfare.

Kelley Parris of Montgomery, Ala., has led that state's child abuse prevention efforts since 2008. Before that, she was executive director of the West Alabama Mental Health Center Inc., where she worked for six years.

Of the nine Children's Board members present, all but one ranked Parris as their top pick of five finalists, which included three local candidates and another from Washington. Board members said Parris' mix of experience, her management record and her desire to vault the agency's public profile made her an easy choice.

"Her background is tailor-made for what we do," said Chairman Chris Brown, general counsel for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. "She has a child abuse social services background. She has a mental health social services background. She has a media background. Those are all facets of what we want our executive director to do. And her interview was impressive."

Details of her contract must still be negotiated, but the salary range for the position is from \$115,000 to \$140,000. She currently makes \$91,000, according to a resume she submitted with her application. Board members agreed to offer her a two-year contract, which would provide for no more than 12 weeks of severance if she is ever fired.

Attempts to reach Parris late Friday were unsuccessful.

She succeeds Luanne Panacek, who was fired in August after a failed negotiated departure to end her 15-year tenure. That followed months of scrutiny for questionable spending, no-bid contracts and bad workplace morale.

Panacek started facing increased questioning of her decision making after revelations that she let a friend sprinkle holy oil in the agency's Ybor City office building after a tense public meeting.

Board members then hired former Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio to serve as interim chief executive officer. Iorio promptly dismissed 15 employees and ultimately shrank the office, which largely administers grants to nonprofits; to 36 employees from a high of 55 when she took over, something she called "right-sizing" the agency Friday.

The Children's Board was created in 1988 by voters. It receives a small slice of property taxes that it then doles out to 30 or so nonprofit groups focusing on child welfare. Iorio said the agency now uses just 10 percent of its property tax allotment for administration with 81 percent going to direct spending on helping children and families.

"I think she will be able to continue with the fiscal prudence Mayor Iorio has started," said Kevin Beckner, a Hillsborough County commissioner who sits on the board.

Under state law, the agency's funding must go before voters by 2016 to see whether they still approve of their property tax money going to the agency. The public should vote yes, as things stand today, Iorio said.

But she said she thinks work must be done by Parris to explain to the public what the agency does and ensure voters that their money is well spent. She said she thinks Parris will perform that part of her job, and the rest, well.

"She's very accessible and she's used to working in the public realm, because she works for the state," Iorio said. "She's by nature an extrovert. And she's an authentic person."

Iorio, ever a whispered prospect for state office, said for now she plans to go back to what she was doing once Parris' start date is determined. That includes public speaking and consulting about leadership.

Times researcher John Martin contributed to this report. Bill Varian can be reached at varian@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3387.

New leader picked to head Hillsborough Children's Board 05/10/13 [Last modified: Friday, May 10, 2013 9:36pm]

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Carrera kids art show

BY HOLLY KESTENIS, Staff Writer *The Weekly Challenger* May 30, 2013



ST. PETERSBURG – Last week if you had walked into the Enoch Davis Center where the Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program is housed, you probably would have seen teenagers frantically putting the final touches to their masterpieces that will be displayed in a downtown studio.

They've been studying various art techniques for most of the year, and they are really excited about The First Annual Carrera Youth Exhibition that will be held at The Studio@620, located at 620 1st Ave. S. From May 31- June 7, their artwork will be on display. The event is free to the

public and student's artwork will be up for sale. Self-Expression Coordinator Marcella Estevez works with the Carrera program, a group of over 40 teenagers from John Hopkins Middle School. She became involved with the program a few years ago when her husband, who runs the Edible Peace Patch Project, was called in by Director Susan Jenkins to work with the students on environmental topics. "Some days the kids are really happy to be there and to be doing work," Estevez admitted stating the ability to adapt when it comes to children is essential, "and then other days they say they want to play outside."

But Estevez found a way to break through and help each child connect to some form of artwork. A feat she doesn't take lightly. They've practiced still life, drawing flowers in vases, which will be showcased at the exhibit. But some students took it a step further, experimenting with cubism by drawing disproportionate faces while others focused on the art of self-expression.

"Even though I bring the materials, they sometimes don't connect with it," Estevez explained, "but it doesn't matter because there has been a huge evolution in what the kids did when they first came, to what is happening now." All sorts of materials from watercolors and acrylics to ink and markers were used to create the student's work and Estevez couldn't be more proud of the effort each child put forth.

The Carrera program is an organization supported by the Juvenile Welfare Board and Pinellas County Health Department.

Sixty boys and girls were selected from John Hopkins Middle School to participate in the mentoring program and will continue in the program throughout high school. The St. Petersburg model is mirrored after a program in Harlem in an effort to provide a positive, loving support system for young people and their parents.

Thirteen-year-old Ayanna Kinsler is excited about her artwork and the opportunity to have it hang for others to see. She used an array of utensils to create different textures in her art, and can't wait until exhibition day.

"I used acrylic paint, crayons, color pencils and watercolors to make different designs inside of the frame," Kinsler explained as she expressed her enjoyment with the assignment. "It's really fun and I like drawing."

According to Estevez the children were given the opportunity to choose paintings and drawings they felt connected to. They were given an assignment and asked to follow specific instructions in order to learn different techniques. However, certain days were allocated as "free drawing" days in which the children were able to illustrate their own work. Some were so spectacular Estevez opted to showcase them as well.

Estevez loves the times she is able to interact with the kids, although she admits there are moments when the road is a bit difficult. "I've been with them for almost two and a half years

and they are my kids,” she said extolling her fortune to be involved with the program. “I learn more from them than they learn from me,” she continued pointing to their loving and caring nature. “I am very lucky to be here with them.”

Jerry Hedgeman, III is another Carrera kid hoping his masterpiece will sell.

Using watercolors and ink to portray flowers in a vase, he hopes his combination of colors will entice buyers to spend big. “I used blue, green, and yellow and black because I liked the way it looked,” Hedgeman acknowledged as he confessed his desire to usually draw animals. “I hope it will sell for a lot so I can spend it on my mama.”

The Carrera program participates in the Job Club program where children earn a stipend for completing educational sessions where they learn about financing and managing checking accounts. Estevez says any money earned from their paintings will be entered into the student’s account. The children learn how to save and spend in appropriate situations.

Estevez is happy with the results of this year’s efforts and hopes the children will continue to be open to expressing themselves in a positive and art filled way. “When I’m in a bad mood just the smile of the kids or the humor of the kids changes my day,” Estevez expressed, “and that’s why I say they bring so much to my life.”

Forty-two paintings or drawings will hang on the walls at The Studio@620, a local arts venue downtown that is always open to showcasing student art.

The show opens this Friday evening from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. and will continue to run through June 7 with midday showings from noon to 4 p.m.

<http://www.theweeklychallenger.com/#!community-news/ckvd>

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