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TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
VIA JESUS MEREJO, CITY MANAGER
FROM JENNIFER DAVIS, CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE
SUBJECT SUMMARY OF SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES
DATE NOVEMBER 20, 2025

This memo is to summarize small business support services in Port St. Lucie. Said activities are a three-prong approach with services offered by the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Small Business Development Center at Indian River State College, and City of Port St. Lucie ("City") staff.

The **St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce** ("Chamber"), in partnership with the City, offers two targeted programs designed to support small business development and reduce barriers to growth: the Small Business Assistance Program ("SBAP") and the Business Beginnings Program ("BBP"). These programs serve as vital resources for entrepreneurs navigating the complexities of launching and expanding their business in Port St. Lucie. Backed by annual City grants totaling \$75,000, these programs reflect a shared commitment to fostering economic vitality and sustainable business success in Port St. Lucie.

Established in 2019, the SBAP is tailored to help existing and prospective business owners navigate the City's regulatory landscape when seeking to purchase, build, expand, relocate, or repurpose commercial space. SBAP provides informal advisory support to reduce cost, risk, and time delays, assists with guidance on zoning, permitting, and development process, and provides strategic recommendations for site selection and compliance. The Chamber assembled a multidisciplinary Advisory Team of experts to provide informal suggestions and options, including members from the following professions: attorneys, land planners, engineers, permitting specialists, general contractors, and representatives from both the Treasure Coast Builders Association and Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County. The City provides an annual grant of \$25,000 to sustain the SBAP program and its advisory network.

Established in 2021, the BBP was designed to guide entrepreneurs through the critical early stages of business formation. Its primary goal is to educate small business owners on the City's regulatory requirements and the business tax receipt approval process. The program is intended to help reduce confusion and delays for new business owners, ensuring a smoother and more informed entry into the local economy. This program provides one-on-one guidance for start-ups, provides support with business tax receipt applications, coordinates with City Departments on behalf of applicants to resolve issues, and provides direct access to Chamber staff for personalized assistance. The City provides an annual grant of \$50,000 to support the BBP program operations and outreach efforts.

Another small business development resource is the **Florida Small Business Development Center** ("FSBDC"), which serves as the State's principal provider of small business assistance helping small businesses grow and succeed. The FSBDC is hosted at Indian River State College ("IRSC"), with credentialed consultants offering entrepreneurial training, business technical assistance access to professional resources to new and existing small businesses located in the Treasure Coast Region. In 2020, the City entered an interlocal agreement with IRSC on behalf of the FSBDC to provide \$35,000 in matching funds for a full-time consultant for the Pruitt Campus to assist new and existing Port St. Lucie small businesses. Due to the demand for new business start-ups, the FSBDC requested an additional \$36,000 to fund a part-time consultant and related administrative costs, to assist new small businesses opening in Port St. Lucie. The funding provided by the City significantly increased the FSBDC's capacity to assist Port St. Lucie small businesses.

The **City of Port St. Lucie** is committed to continuing to foster small businesses through a suite of targeted programs that support growth, development, and sustainability. City staff provides ongoing, personalized assistance to help new and expanding businesses understand and navigate the City's regulatory processes. These services streamline access to permits, licensing, zoning, and other compliance requirements, reducing delays, often improving outcomes for business owners. Additionally, the City facilitates a 10-week accelerator program course conducted by the IRSC School of Continuing Education for new and existing businesses. The course equips entrepreneurs with essential skills in finance, marketing, operations and strategic planning. Graduates are eligible to apply for a small business grant of up to \$5,000. The City pays for the course and provides funding for the small business grants.

The City offers a Before You Sign the Lease Program, which is an active, educational quarterly workshop that helps prospective business owners understand zoning, permitting, business tax requirements and site selection considerations before committing to a commercial location. City staff facilitate monthly Small Business Development Team meetings to discuss small business outreach and engagement and are planning the City's inaugural Port St. Lucie Small Business Conference to be held at the MidFlorida Event Center in October 2026. Additionally, monthly emails are sent to new business owners to request a business consultation, and connections are made between small business owners and resource providers for management and technical assistance and entrepreneurial training.

Together these programs reflect the City's unwavering commitment to cultivating a dynamic and resilient small business ecosystem. By offering hands-on navigation services, targeted training programs, and direct financial support, small businesses are empowered to overcome regulatory hurdles, make informed decisions, and accelerate their growth. These initiatives not only reduce barriers to entry and expansion but also foster innovation, job creation, and long-term vitality. Through our strategic partners and continued investment, the City is building a foundation where small businesses can thrive, contribute meaningfully to the community, and shape the future and diversity of the local economy.

At this time, staff recommends the City continue to partner with the Chamber and the FSBDC to foster existing initiatives and develop and implement programs that will continue to support Port St. Lucie's small business community. City staff will closely monitor the agreements with both organizations to ensure the required reporting and deliverables are met. These partnerships will also be reviewed annually during the City's strategic planning and budget cycles to evaluate the level of continued participation by the City to best meet the needs of the small business community.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need any additional information.