

City of Port St. Lucie

Citizen's Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

121 SW Port St. Lucie
Blvd.
Port St. Lucie, Florida
34984

Lynette Lockwood, Chair
Michael Bernard, Vice Chair
Raymond Pezzi, Member
Christy Romano, Member
Melony Zaravelis, Member
Ingrid Sarmiento, Member
James Abbott, Member
Harry Williams, Alternate

CAC

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

1:30 PM

Room 366, City Hall

1. Call to Order

A Regular Meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the City of Port St. Lucie was called to order by Chair Lynette Lockwood on March 19, 2025, at 1:34 PM, Room 366, Port St. Lucie City Hall, 121 Port St. Lucie Boulevard, Port St. Lucie, Florida.

2. Roll Call

Members Present:

Michael Bernard, Vice Chair
Lynette Lockwood, Chair
Raymond Pezzi
Ingrid Sarmiento
Christy Romano

Members Not Present:

Melony Zaravelis
Harry Williams
James Abott

Others Present:

Stephen Okiye, Finance Director
Caroline Sturgis, OMB Director
Yvonne White, Business Tax Manager
Jasmin Padova, Executive Assistant
Margaret Carland, Senior Deputy City Attorney
Alyssa Lunin, Senior Deputy City Attorney

3. Determination of Quorum

Chair Lockwood indicated there was a quorum.

At this point, Stephen Okiye, Finance Director, informed the Committee that he would be leading the Citizen Advisory Committee and Citizens Infrastructure Surtax Citizens Oversight Committee meetings for approximately the next three months while Mr. Graham is out on leave. Mr. Okiye read aloud an email from Mr. Graham to the Committee.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.a January 15, 2025 Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes.

[2025-253](#)

There being no corrections, Committee Member Bernard moved to approve the minutes of January 15, 2025. Committee Member Romano seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

5. Public to be Heard

There were no comments from the public.

6. New Business

6.a Oath of Office for the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

[2025-265](#)

Jasmin Padova informed the Committee that Harry Williams was not able to attend this meeting, so his Oath of Office will be tabled to the next meeting.

Chair Lockwood noted that there was still one vacancy on the Committee. Ms. Padova stated she would check with the Clerk's Office on the status of the applications for this vacancy.

There being no further discussion, Committee Member Sarmiento moved to table Item 6.a to the next Citizens Advisory Committee meeting. Committee Member Romano seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

6.b Business Tax Update

[2025-255](#)

Yvonne White, Business Tax Manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Business Tax Collection Initiatives Enhancing Compliance and Efficiency for Port St. Lucie. She reviewed the business tax application process, renewal process, and compliance tracking/enforcement. Ms. White noted the City has a small department to serve about 11,000 businesses within the City. She discussed residential and commercial applicants, which generate over \$2 million to the General Fund, and compliance challenges/impacts. Ms. White concluded her presentation by reviewing the strategies to increase compliance,

discussing the interlocal agreement with the County to process business taxes, and requesting an additional compliance officer for FY 2026.

Committee Members Pezzi and Bernard inquired about the interlocal agreement with the County. Ms. White explained the agreement would streamline the application process, as the City would collect the Business Tax Receipt (BTR) fees for the City and the County, and share the fees collected with the County.

Committee Member Pezzi asked if or when a Special Magistrate is involved in the business tax process. Ms. White explained the process of non-compliance and how a lien is placed on the property by the City, if the fine or fee is not paid.

Committee Member Sarmiento inquired as to what constitutes a business. Ms. White indicated a 1099 independent contractor, working for yourself and not being an employee of a company, requires a Business Tax Receipt. She noted that 99% of their applicants register online.

Chair Lockwood inquired how the interlocal agreement with the County would work for unpaid business taxes. Ms. White explained the City would collect the fees for the City and County, and share that revenue with the County. She noted the agreement was still being drafted by Legal, but the County was very receptive to the presentation. Vice Chair Bernard stated the City should get paid for their services.

Vice Chair Bernard indicated the Committee made a recommendation to add at least two employees to the BTR office and inquired about the status. Mr. Okiye stated the request will be in the next budget.

Chair Lockwood asked about the duration of the interlocal agreement. Ms. White and Mr. Okiye explained the duration has not yet been determined, but it would probably align with the review of Business Tax Receipts.

Chair Lockwood commented on adding employees to the Business Tax Department and having a robust interlocal agreement to accommodate the costs of doing business. Ms. White stated that costs will be included in the discussions, as the City is looking for a win/win situation.

Vice Chair Bernard added that there will be salaries, benefits, etc., so he did not want the City to lose any money as it is doing the heavy lifting and the Special Magistrate is another cost. Ms. White clarified the City would be only collecting the revenue or fees for the County. She stated the City would be taking only City cases to the Special Magistrate, which is the

current process. Ms. White indicated these questions and more will be addressed with the County. She stated the City will not accept any losses or burdensome requests from the County.

Chair Lockwood stated it would be interesting to know how many businesses are in the City versus the County. Ms. White explained the County was not as active in BTRs as the City, so it would be an advantage for the County to have the City collect the business taxes.

Chair Lockwood inquired about the status of on-boarding a third party or collection agency for unpaid funds. Ms. White stated a collection service would be too expensive, so this option has been tabled at this time.

Committee Member Pezzi asked how the City got to having 1,800 businesses not in compliance. Ms. White explained there was a gap in enforcement after losing their licensing investigator in 2015; however, they added a compliance officer four years ago. Committee Member Pezzi expected the number of non-compliant businesses to decrease in the future.

Mr. Okiye and Ms. White informed the Committee that Business Tax has started working with the Communications Department on a campaign, monthly newsletter, and starter kit to help educate the businesses. Ms. White noted the City's website states that fines can be assessed if a business is found to be operating without a business tax receipt.

Vice Chair Bernard inquired about the percentage of non-compliant businesses in the City. Ms. White indicated that 1,800 business are without a business tax, which equals \$350,000 in revenue. She stated the City has 11,000 businesses and 2,700 have not renewed their business tax receipts. Ms. White explained the City was now sending text messages versus utilizing robo-calls, and there has been a better response rate with the new texting campaign.

Vice Chair Bernard asked about the Committee's suggestion of putting the name of the business owner on the BTR, along with the social security numbers of the property owner. Ms. White indicated this information is now on the form and thanked the Committee for their recommendations.

Chair Lockwood stated they would entertain a motion on behalf of the Business Tax Receipt office to request an additional compliance officer for FY 2026. Vice Chair Bernard moved to add two people. Chair Lockwood indicated Committee Member Romano motioned to add one additional officer. Committee Member Sarmiento seconded the motion. Chair

Lockwood stated the Committee was all in favor.

Committee Member Pezzi stated he would like to make a motion that within a stipulated period of time, the Business Tax office comes back to provide an update on their progress. Chair Lockwood suggested having an update after the discussions are held regarding the interlocal agreement.

Committee Member Pezzi inquired as to the timing of the interlocal agreement. Ms. White explained that once Legal completes the document, the City will then meet with the County and discussions will start. She hoped to have the agreement in place for the new year.

Committee Member Pezzi stated they were thinking of adding an additional person to take on the County fees, and asked if the Business Tax office needed an additional person. Vice Chair Bernard stated they should amend the motion to add two people. Chair Lockwood recommended moving forward with the one employee, as the motion passed. She stated pending the outcome of the interlocal agreement, the Committee can reintroduce adding a second employee.

Chair Lockwood asked Ms. White to discuss how the Business Tax office was collaborating with Elijah Wooten, the City's Economic Development Administrator. Ms. White explained they were working together to provide resources to those who have or are looking to start a small business. She stated she defines a small business as those businesses in the City that are not corporately owned.

7. Unfinished Business

Chair Lockwood informed the Committee that they will receive their schedule of projects from the City Council within the next 30 days.

Chair Lockwood also informed the Committee that she spoke with Keith Bradshaw at The Saints, who stated the golf course is running smoothly and on its way to increasing profitability. She indicated they discussed halting the quarterly updates to this Committee. Chair Lockwood stated there was a recommendation for the Committee to entertain and ratify that the golf course continue with its business and not provide the Committee with quarterly updates.

Vice Chair Bernard explained he wanted the Committee to receive annual updates from the golf course, because it is a past project. He moved to have The Saints golf course report its progress to the Citizen Advisory Committee once a year and halt its quarterly updates to the Committee. Committee Member Sarmiento seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

Mr. Okiye informed the Committee that Solid Waste will be scheduled to provide an update on their department.

Committee Member Pezzi asked why the Citizens Advisory Committee is having a problem getting assignments. Mr. Okiye indicated the City Council will be providing some direction at their next meeting. Chair Lockwood discussed improving efficiencies within the City's organization and how this Committee is involved. Committee Member Pezzi believed the Citizens Advisory Committee would be obsolete in the near future. Chair Lockwood stated she did not agree, as they always need citizen oversight.

Mr. Okiye and Committee Member Pezzi discussed how past projects turned into additional projects for this Committee when they started to research and do their due diligence. Chair Lockwood discussed getting back on track, meetings with constituents, etc.

Committee Member Pezzi stated he wondered if the Committee was doing important work. Mr. Okiye discussed the importance of upcoming projects, as the City is growing and the City Council is always looking to reduce the millage rate. He indicated the Citizens Advisory Committee could be directed to look at the fees charged for the parks, for example.

Committee Member Pezzi stated this Committee wants to work on projects that will make a contribution. Vice Chair Bernard discussed how there were slow and busy periods for projects in years past. Chair Lockwood commented on how conversations and decisions change along the way. She stated the Committee will always do meaningful work and the City appreciates everyone's contribution of time, energy, and ideas.

Committee Member Sarmiento questioned if there was a motion for the golf course updates. To ensure the motion was finalized, Vice Chair Bernard moved to have The Saints provide an annual review of the golf course and eliminate the quarterly updates. Committee Member Romano seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

Committee Member Pezzi explained the Citizens Advisory Committee should be notified if anything is happening at The Saints. He stated it did not need to be a presentation, but he would like an annual update and to be kept abreast of what the golf course is doing. Chair Lockwood suggested the Committee members meet individually with Keith Bradshaw, Golf Course Administrator, if they have any concerns. She asked Committee Member Pezzi if he wanted to amend the motion on the floor, and he indicated they did not need a motion.

Vice Chair Bernard stated The Saints will make a lot more money than last year.

Committee Member Pezzi expressed that the golf course is constantly changing and he believed Mr. Bradshaw liked the visibility he was getting. Committee Member Pezzi stated if the golf course decides to do something different, Mr. Bradshaw can provide an update to the Committee without a formal presentation. Vice Chair Bernard added that the Committee can invite Mr. Bradshaw to attend a Citizen Advisory Committee meeting to provide an update.

8. Adjourn

There being no further discussion, Committee Member Sarmiento moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:45 PM. Committee Member Romano seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

Lynette Lockwood, Chair

Traci Mehl, Deputy City Clerk