

MINUTES OF THE ARANSAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

WORKSHOP MEETING - October 7, 2021

BE IT REMEMBERED that on the 7th day of October, 2021, the Honorable Commissioners Court of Aransas County, Texas, met for a Workshop Meeting, at the Aransas County Courthouse, 2840 Hwy 35 N, Rockport, Texas, with the following members present: C. H. "Burt" Mills, Jr., County Judge; Leslie Casterline, Commissioner, Precinct 2; Pat Rousseau, Commissioner, Precinct 3; Wendy Laubach, Commissioner, Precinct 4; and Carrie Arrington, County Clerk.

Jack Chaney, Commissioner Precinct 1-1A was absent.

Other County Officials/Department Heads/Staff Members present: Jennifer O'Steen, Assistant County Attorney; Jacky Cockerham, County Auditor; and Kim Foutz, Long-Term Recovery.

Members of Other Governmental Entities or Community Groups and Interested Parties present: Michael Meek, Meek and Associates, LLC; John Jackson, Barbara Gurtner, and Jatin Bhaktan, Aransas County Partnership Economic Development Corporation (EDC); and Mike Probst, Editor and Publisher, The Rockport Pilot.

Aransas County Citizens present: Carolyn Smith and Kristie Rutledge.

The Meeting was duly convened at 9:02 a.m. Roll call was taken and a quorum was declared by Judge Mills, WHEREUPON, the following proceedings were had and done, to wit:

1. A Presentation entitled *Another Step Forward for Economic Recovery and Sustainability* was given by Michael Meek, of Meek and Associates, LLC, followed by discussion on the following:

- A. Recommendations for economic development policies, programs, guidelines, and criteria to include in a County Resolution adopting guidelines and criteria for tax abatements and rebates pursuant to Chapter 312 of the Tax Code, Property Redevelopment and Tax Abatement Act; and,
- B. Recommendations for the County to adopt a Community and Economic Development Program pursuant to Local Government Code Chapter 381, County Development and Growth; and,
- C. Additional recommendations and options for Economic Development policies.

Mr. Meek stated that our community has done a wonderful job attracting tourism - which has been very good for our local growth and economy. However, he also noted that neither tourism nor hospitality can sustain our economy long-term, particularly during the aftermath of a major disaster like a Hurricane Harvey, and suggested that we add more non-tourism businesses into our economy to increase our tax base and change its mix. Currently, our tax base is 87% residential and 13% non-residential, but a healthier balance would have the non-residential (business) tax payer base percentage closer to the state average of 60%.

He cited a November 2017 study done for Aransas County by Texas A&M Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) following Hurricane Harvey and talked about the study's main takeaway - that a more diverse economy is recommended for our county. He also mentioned a December 2017 Housing Recovery Plan by Pegasus Planning and Development (an award-winning and nationally renowned firm specializing in innovative development projects and economic strategies for higher education institutions, government entities, and private sector businesses) which summarized that utilizing Tax Code Chapter 312 (Property Redevelopment and Tax

Abatement Act), Local Government Code Chapters 380-381 (Economic Development Agreements (EDAs)), Tax Code Chapter 311 (Tax Increment Financing (TIFs)), and fee waivers should be on our community's "to do" list.

Then he shared an outline of the Economic Development Action Plan put together for our area by International Economic Development Council (IEDC). The IEDC Action Plan included: addressing our infrastructure to recruit targeted business sectors, business recruitment readiness, healthcare gaps, leveraging the Aransas County Airport, workforce needs, along with sites and buildings. These plans were adopted by resolution by Aransas County, City of Rockport, Town of Fulton, Navigation District, and Chamber of Commerce then incorporated into the Aransas County Long-Term Recovery Plan.

Mr. Meek also mentioned a March 2020 study put together by IC²: *Rockport-Fulton Regional Study for Community Resilience*. This study further emphasized the key tools available to local governments: Chapter 380-381 EDAs, Chapter 311 TIFs/TIRZs (Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones), and Government Code Chapter 372 (Public Improvement Districts (PIDs)).

[The IC² Institute was established at The University of Texas at Austin in 1977, as a think-and-do tank to explore the broad economic, technological, and human factors that drive economic development in regions. Their mission is to better understand and catalyze communities outside major urban areas to become more collaborative and resilient through a human-centered approach. They actively engage with community leaders, government, industry, philanthropies, and other researchers to address the cross-cutting issues and opportunities for smaller, remote communities.]

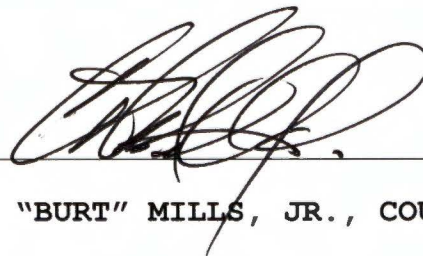
Mr. Meek closed his presentation by talking about the role of Meek & Associates in this process of diversifying our economy, which included drafting Chapter 312, 380-381, 311, and 372 policies, procedures, and agreements, and developing target business sectors

and strategy. Our previous economic development program expired in 2013, was amended in 2016, and is now expired again.

Commissioners Laubach and Rousseau objected to the "super majority" requirement for any amendment or repeal for a two-year period following adoption, contained in Section 11 of the Tax Abatement and Tax Rebate Policy Resolution offered by Mr. Meek. They also objected to having a workshop introducing new economic development policy followed by a quick vote to adopt it at the next Commissioners' Court. They thought that citizens should have more time to review and respond to any proposed policy changes. The Court agreed to a waiting period of thirty (30) days following public dissemination of such information.

Citizen Kristie Rutledge voiced concern over economic development policies that could raise taxes and eventually tax people out of their homes. She asked the Court to carefully consider this possibility before they take action.

The Workshop was adjourned at 10:58 a.m. on a motion duly made by Commissioner Casterline and seconded by Commissioner Rousseau.



C. H. "BURT" MILLS, JR., COUNTY JUDGE



CARRIE ARRINGTON, EX-OFFICIO CLERK
OF THE COMMISSIONERS COURT

