



## **Minutes**

**January 9, 2025**

**2:00 p.m.**

The January meeting of the Southside Economic Development District Board of Commissioners was held in the City Council Chamber of the City of Monroe on Thursday, January 9, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

Present were Tony Little, Roosevelt Wright, Jr, Atty Sarah Smith, Karl Dhaliwal, Min. T.J. Stevenson, Ms. Jessica DeTiege, Herb Guillory. Mrs. Anna Reed, Rev. Michael Douglas. Kenneth Hall was absent. In addition, several guests were present, including NAACP president Cliff Thomas, City Councilmember Verbon Muhammad, and City Council researcher/aide L Marie Brown.

There was a quorum.

An invocation was offered by Rev. Douglas.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Little recommended that we not approve the December 16, 2024, minutes because members had not had a chance to review them. The secretary noted that they were posted on the website.

Atty. Smith moved to pass over the approval of the minutes.

AYES: Little, Smith, Dhaliwal, Stevenson, DeTiege, Guillory, Reed, Douglas

NAYS: Wright

The motion carried.

### **Dream Center**

Mr. Little noted that plans for the Dream Center have been approved by the Fire Marshal. He expects us to be in a position by the next week or so to turn on lights and complete the facility.

Mr. Little said he would take the lead in completing the remaining items needed for the building. He appointed Mr. Guillory to handle the technology needs of the center, noting that others would be solicited to help with furnishings and decorations. They will operate within the extra \$30,000 allocated on September 9 for the building completion.

### **Website**

Mr. Little said he spoke with Fabian Gonzales of Rebirth Designs to clarify his role in website and email administration. He said Mr. Gonzales clarified that he is the administrator of both for maintenance purposes and that Mr. Wright manages the input of data and updates to content. He said Mr. Wright does not have access to individual email content.

### **Email**

Mr. Little asked Mr. Wright to explain the email and communications procedures. Mr. Wright said because of the Open Meetings laws, SEDD emails are public records; therefore, SEDD members should not use their personal emails for SEDD communications. Each SEDD member has an email account and should respond to emails using that account.

### **Bylaws**

Mr. Little appointed Atty Smith to review the bylaws and update them. He said he had assigned it to a committee and is reassigning the task to Atty Smith for review immediately.

### **Treasurer's report**

Mr. Wright, secretary/treasurer, gave the following report:

Treasurer's Report Southside Economic Development District (SEDD) Monroe, Louisiana as of December 1, 2024

Hotel/Motel Tax Receipts as of November 30, 2024. \$9,100.01

Recent expenditures included: Harris Lawn Service \$1,050.00, Rebirth Designs, \$3,600; AAA Glass \$1,630.00, State Farm Insurance, \$673.83, Youth Initiative Mini-Grant, \$500; St. Matthews Recovery Center \$500; Choice Mentoring Community Garden \$500; Choice Mentoring Clean up Initiative \$500; BK Mentoring \$500; Youth Initiative \$500; Just Run the Play Videos \$1000.

Two mini-grant recipients have not reported receipts or reports for their activities: Youth initiatives grants awarded to Mondrian Douglas and Damian Harris. Both organizations they represent received mini-grants of \$1,000 each.

As of January 9, 2025, SEDD has a total of \$264,060.46. Of the total available funds, \$217,500.00 is earmarked for fund balances, outstanding obligations, and budgeted committee allocations. There is \$46,560.46 available in our accounts for non-committed board-approved projects.

### **RCH Contract**

Mr. Little moved to send the completed study and contract of RCH engineering to the Infrastructure committee for review and that the committee would report its recommendations to the board. The Motion was seconded by Atty Smith.

AYES: Smith, Wright, Dhaliwal, Reed, Detiege, Douglas, Stevenson, Little, Guillory.

ABSENT: Hall.

The Motion carried.

### **Board Attorney**

Mr. Little moved to approve a resolution to accept Mr. Brandon Creekbaum as the board's attorney for a period of not more than 30 days to help resolve all outstanding issues before appointing a permanent counsel. In addition, Atty Smith would be authorized to negotiate fee arrangements with Attorney Jessica Smith and report back to the board. The Motion was seconded by Atty. Smith.

The following board members made comments before the vote.

Mr. Guillory and Mrs. Stevenson noted that if the board intended to bring on Atty Jessica Williams or some other attorney, that should work along with Mr. Creekbaum. Mr. Creekbaum, being the city's attorney, will do what's best for the city, said Mr. Guillory, and would be conflicted.

Mr. Wright said Mr. Creekbaum is the city's attorney and would be conflicted should SEDD pursue any course that is contrary to the direction of the city. He said SEDD had to sue the city recently, and should it happen again, Mr. Creekbaum would be privy to SEDD's thinking and vulnerabilities when he assumes the defense of the city against any contrary action SEDD may take.

Mrs. Detiege said the specific things Mr. Creekbaum will be assisting us with during the interim period should be clarified and should be sufficient to indicate the limited scope of his interim service.

Mr. Little said the board should work with the city to ensure seamless cooperation. He did not foresee any conflicts, especially since it's only on an interim basis. He encouraged the board to accept his offer to help SEDD straighten out its bylaws, review outstanding issues, and clear the way for a permanent attorney to be hired later.

AYES: Little, Dhaliwal, Detiege, Guillory

NAYES: Wright, Reed, Stevenson

ABSENT: Hall, Douglas (left the meeting)

Motion failed. (Six required for passage)

### **Meeting Times**

The board took no action on setting a standard meeting day and time for future meetings.

### **Remaining Items Passed Over**

Mr. Little moved that the board skip over the remaining agenda item involving authorizing him to plan a Declaration on Poverty event for April in collaboration with the Monroe City Council and the President's report. The Motion was seconded by Atty. Smith.

AYES: Little, Dhaliwal, Detiege, Wright, Reed, Stevenson

ABSENT: Hall, Douglas (left the meeting), Guillory (Left the meeting)

Motion carried.

The board allowed citizens to participate in every agenda item and received comments from the public at the end of the meeting.

After 1 hour and 46 minutes of deliberation, the meeting adjourned.

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Tony Little

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Roosevelt Wright, Jr., Secretary/Treasurer

Mr. Little, the President, recommended Atty Sarah Smith to fill the remainder of the vice-president's term, and it was seconded by Mr. Wright. He did not ask for other nominations. The recommendation was unanimously approved.

### **Dream Center**

Mr. Little reported that TBA Architecture has volunteered to draw plans for the dream center and submit them to the state fire marshal for approval. He said TBA expects about three weeks to complete the fire marshal review. He said he would ensure that all board members received a copy of the report. Afterward, the board will be tasked with issuing an RFP to make any changes to the facility required to get the fire marshal's final approval. He said he hopes that by our February meeting, some action on the Dream Center will begin.

### **Committee's Appointed**

Mr. Little noted that Mr. Wright is the chair of the Safe Neighborhood and Crime Prevention Committee. He appointed Rev. Stevenson, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Dhaliwal to that committee. He said Mr. Hall will chair the DBE committee eventually, but he is presently serving as the chair. Others who will serve on that committee will be Mr. Little, Miss Detiege, and Mr. Guillory. The Infrastructure committee will be headed by Bishop Douglas. Other members are Rev. Stevenson, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Wright. The Housing Committee will continue to be headed by Mrs. Reed. Others on the committee will be Mr. Dhaliwal, Mr. Guillory, and Mr. Little.

Mr. Little said Mr. Guillory would also chair a new committee that is not part of the

SEDD 25-year plan. It will be called the strategic planning committee and will be comprised of all new members of the board along with Mr. Little. Members are Atty Smith, T.J. Stevenson, Jessica DeTiege, Kenneth Hall, Herb Guillory, Anna Reed Micheal Douglas, and Mr. Little. He said the committee is tasked to review past initiatives, evaluate their effectiveness, and make recommendations to the leadership about the path forward.

### **RCH Infrastructure Study**

Mr. Little said he would request that Mr. Ron Haisty appear before the board to clarify his arrangements before he signed the agreement he made. Mr. Wright noted that the board approved the RCH agreement unanimously. He had signed the agreement as secretary-treasurer. He said RCH had completed the study on time and had submitted the drafts. He is waiting to present it to the committee, make necessary changes, and then finally present it to the board. Mr. Little took issue with Mr. Wright's authority to sign a contract. He maintained that only the President can sign contracts. Mr. Wright said our constitution provides that the President and the Secretary/Treasurer can sign for SEDD but does not say both are required.

Mr. Wright said RCH had completed the study on time and is waiting to formally present it to the infrastructure committee and the board. Since RCH has turned in its report, Mr. Wright asked the report be given to the Infrastructure Committee so that the company could make its presentation to them and make any changes before presenting it to the SEDD board.

Mr. Little says he will not take that action until the matter of the contract is resolved. He said that SEDD will not pay the \$50,000 because the board has not received anything from RCH, he has never appeared before the board and the President did not sign his contract. He said RCH should make its report to the entire board and not to the committee.

Mrs. Stevenson said that regardless of the question of signatures if RCH has completed the work, the company should be paid.

Atty. Smith said the matter was on the agenda at her first meeting. She remembers voting for the committee's recommendation but was not aware that she had voted to approve the contract. She said she was not aware that the RCH contract was in the board packet.

Mrs. Marie Brown said she served on the infrastructure advisory committee, and the recommendation was made by the committee to the board, and it was approved. She said it is problematic for Mr. Little to have a change of heart after voting to approve the contract to have a change of heart and notify one board member by telephone. If

it was to be undone, then a special should have been called for that purpose.

Mrs. Kenya Roberson, President of the Black Chamber of Commerce, said the board should take a vote to clarify who is expected to sign contracts because if it is not resolved, the problem will occur again. Mr. Little said there was no need for a vote because the subject had already been addressed.

No action was taken

### **SEDD Attorney**

Mr. Little advised the board that he requested Mr. Brandon Creekbaum to review SEDD's bylaws and provide us with his legal insights. Mr. Wright reminded the board that Atty. Kevin Johnson has represented SEDD in legal proceedings in the past, one of which was against the City of Monroe. He said Atty Johnson worked pro bono and only charged for actual court time and filing fees. However, Mr. Little said Mr. Johnson is not SEDD's attorney because we never signed a contract with him. Mr. Wright said Atty Creekbaum is the city attorney, and since we have had to sue the city recently, it may be necessary to do so again. He said using Mr. Creekbaum as the SEDD attorney is not to SEDD's advantage, especially since he wrote SEDD a letter refusing to serve us in the past.

No action was taken.

### **Approval of the September 9 and October 3 Minutes**

Mr. Little said he was 100% diametrically opposed to the approval of the minutes because they contain legal issues that he believes need to be reviewed by the city attorney. Mr. Wright reminded the chairman the minutes are records of actions taken at a meeting; approval of the minutes does mean agreement with the actions reported. He reminded the board that if minutes are not attached to invoices, the city will not pay disbursement requisitions. Failure to adopt minutes delays the payment of bills.

Rev. Stevenson moved to adopt the September 9 and October 3 minutes, seconded by Mr. Wright.

Mrs. Stevenson and Mr. Wright voted in favor.

Mr. Dhaliwal, Mr. Little, voted no, Atty Smith, no.

Mrs. Detiege did not vote; she had to leave the meeting.

Mr. Hall, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Guillory did not vote because they were not present at either of the meetings.

**The motion failed.**

Mr. Little made a motion to get a legal opinion from the city attorney about the legality of the issues discussed in the minutes. Mr. Wright asked for clarity, and Mr. Little said, "The motion is to evaluate this whole action here and give me a recommendation on it."

Rev. Douglas said he is a new commissioner who was not at either of the meetings and feels more comfortable getting a legal opinion on the matter to determine whether we are going in the right direction.

Rev. Stevenson said we should ask Atty Smith to make the review since she is an attorney, but Atty Smith said she felt that would be a conflict.

Mrs. Brown said the city attorney can only listen to the voice recording and decide whether the minutes are accurate. He can't give an opinion about the legality of the items discussed.

After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Little withdrew his motion to get a legal opinion of the minutes of September 9 and October 3. He ordered that the September 9th minutes would transcribed word for word transcription. A question was asked about who would pay for the transcription, but no answer or action was taken in response.

Mr. Little moved that the September 9 and October 3rd minutes be rejected but was reminded that the approval had already been voted on and denied. He withdrew his motion.

### **Treasurer's report**

Mr. Wright gave a written report of SEDD's finances.

He said the proposed budget for 2025-26 must be approved and submitted to the city for inclusion in the city's 2025-26 fiscal year budget. If one is not approved, the city will develop one for us. A proposed budget based on \$120,000 in projected hotel/motel tax revenue and \$145,000 in expenses is attached. It is suggested that the \$25,000 overage be charged to state funds being held in trust for SEDD, as it is not a part of the city's budgeted income and expenses. The board is not obligated to adopt the treasurer's recommendation but should decide on the proposed budget at the December meeting.

Hotel/Motel Tax Receipts for November 2024: \$1,211.00. The total received for fiscal 2024 is \$62,605.14.

Current Funds on Hand (as of November 2024): General Fund: \$262,101.62 State Revenues: \$54,449.67 Total Funds on Hand: \$316,551.29 as of November 15, 2024 No expenditures have been made for salaries, honorariums, or personal services. It is recommended that the board grant the treasurer permission to pay recurring



budgeted expenses that may occur between SEDD meetings.

Mr. Little made the motion that we authorize the treasurer to pay the recurring bills and any outstanding bills. Mr. Wright expressed frustration that the President votes for things in meetings and then calls after the meeting and says he is against it. He said the back and forth on whether to approve minutes is an example.

Mr. Little said instead of approving the treasurer's report as a whole, he wants to separate the recurring bills from the budget report and that the board authorizes the treasurer to pay the recurring bills.

There was a lengthy discussion about how to handle recurring bills and pay any bills, with a variety of suggestions coming from board members and Mrs. Roberson. Included among them was Bishop Douglas' suggestion that all board members be sent copies of the bills and that a special meeting be held for payment of the bills to be authorized.

Mr. Little moved that the board authorize the President, Vice-President, and the secretary to be given the authority to pay the bills. Mrs. Roberson raised the issue of transparency, stating that if the officers approve the bills without other board members knowing about them, The motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Little asked the treasurer his preference, and Mr. Wright said he preferred that the board adopt the treasurer's report, which includes the bills and the budget.

Mr. Little moved, and Bishop Douglas seconded a motion in which the board agreed to authorize the payment of the bills, with Mr. Wright voting no and Mrs. Detiege not voting, having left earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Little did not favor approval of the treasurer's recommended budget because the city will insert a budget for SEDD, which can later be modified. Mr. Wright said it is a bad reflection on SEDD if each year it fails to submit a budget, prompting the city to insert a generated budget on our behalf. He was gavelled down by the President, who repeatedly told him he was "out of order" for making his comments without being recognized.

Mr. Little would not entertain a vote on a proposed budget because the city will insert a budget for SEDD, which can be changed later.

The board did not adopt the treasurer's report; no vote was taken.

## **2025-26 Budget**

After a lengthy discussion on the budget, with Mr. Little maintaining that the city will budget for us and others suggesting a variety of alternative and unnamed amendments, Mrs. Stevenson moved that the 25-26 budget, as recommended by the treasurer, be adopted with the understanding that changes can be made later. It was approved unanimously, with the exception of Mrs. Detiege and Mrs. Reed, who left earlier.

Mr. Little questioned the amount of funds in the state-appropriated funds because he contacted the city and was told a different figure than is represented on the report. Mr. Wright said regardless of what he was told on the phone, the printouts in the report were provided by the city's finance department.

Mr. Wright reviewed SEDD's balance sheet, income statement, and a listing of every check written on SEDD's behalf by SEDD since May 1, 2024, the beginning of the fiscal year. He also gave each member a copy of the 2023-24 Audit report which was a compilation of SEDD's finances, not a full audit, as stipulated by the Legislative Auditor. He noted that the report listed Mrs. Anna Reed as being a board member, but that was incorrect; Mrs. Rosie Harper, the auditor, said it would be recorrected.

There was a general discussion about the need to approve the minutes of previous meetings because they are required by the city before any disbursements will be made.

Atty Smith noted that she would ask Attorney Jessica Smith to serve as the SEDD attorney. She said we would be "hard pressed" to find an attorney who would serve pro bono as Mr. Johnson did because most attorneys will charge something.

The board considered the recommendation of the Safe Neighborhood committee to pay the next portion of the mini-grant allotment to recipients. The report was approved inclusive of the committee's five-year projection and budget report of \$25,000 per year for five years, focusing on sidewalks, community improvements, etc. Mr. Little was opposed. Mrs. Reed and Mrs. Detiege did not vote because they left earlier.

There was no citizen participation.

After 2 hours and 17 minutes, the meeting adjourned.

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Tony Little, President

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Roosevelt Wright, Jr., secretary/treasurer