



MEMORANDUM
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EDHS
Agenda Item No. 6(B)

TO: Honorable Chairwoman Edmonson
and Members of the Economic Development
and Human Services Committee

DATE: November 12, 2008

FROM: Kay M. Sullivan, Director
Clerk of the Board

SUBJECT: Approval of Commission
Committee Minutes

The following Clerk's Summary of Minutes is submitted by the Clerk of the Board for approval by the Economic Development and Human Services Committee.

➤ October 8, 2008

Attachment
KMS/msy



Stephen P. Clark
Government Center
111 N.W. 1st Street
Miami, FL 33128

**CLERK'S SUMMARY OF
Meeting Minutes
Economic Development and Human Services
Committee**

Audrey M. Edmonson (3) Chair; Katy Sorenson (8) Vice Chair; Commissioners
Barbara J. Jordan (1), Dennis C. Moss (9), and Javier D. Souto (10)

Taxicab Workshop

Wednesday, October 8, 2008

2:00 PM

Commission Chambers

Members Present: Audrey M. Edmonson, Barbara J. Jordan, Dennis C. Moss.

Members Absent: Katy Sorenson, Javier D. Souto.

Members Late: None.

Members Excused: None.

Members Absent County Business: None.

1 MINUTES PREPARED BY:

Report: *Mary Smith-York, Commission Reporter
(305) 375-1598*

1A INVOCATION

1B PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

1C ROLL CALL

Report: *The following staff members were present:
Assistant County Manager Susanne Torriente,
Assistant County Attorney Bruce Libhaber,
Consumer Services Department Director Cathy
Grimes Peel, and Deputy Clerk Mary Smith-York.*

1D **OPENING REMARKS FROM**
CHAIRPERSON EDMONSON

Report: *The Economic Development & Human Services Committee convened in a taxicab workshop in the County Commission Chambers of the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, 111 NW 1st Street, 2nd Floor, Miami, Florida, at 2:00 p.m. Chairwoman Edmonson called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. She noted once the floor was opened for public comment, speakers should limit their comments to two minutes.*

2 **DISCUSSION ITEM(S)**

2A

082836 Discussion ItemDISABLED TAXICAB AVAILABILITY FOR FUTURE
LOTTERY**Presented**

Report: *Ms. Cathy Grimes Peel, Director, Consumer Services Department (CSD), noted the foregoing discussion item was carried over from the April 23, 2008 workshop.*

Chairwoman Edmonson opened the floor for public comment, and the following individual(s) appeared:

1) Mr. Denny Wood, 13000 S.W. 92 Avenue, appeared and noted the Wheelchair Taxi Lottery Program was not functioning as designed. He stated the availability of wheelchair taxi service in areas outside the airport was almost non-existent. Mr. Wood distributed, and read into the record, a list of suggested amendments to the Taxicab Ordinance. He explained these suggestions were the result of a meeting among Mr. Diago Feliciano, Mr. Leslie Eisenberg, Mr. Damian Gregory, Mr. Ronald Fulton, and himself, regarding this issue.

Commissioner Moss asked staff to respond to those issues stated by Mr. Wood, following public comments on this item.

2) Mr. Raymond Francois, 1900 N.E. 16th Avenue, appeared and requested the agendas for future taxicab workshops be made available to the public prior to the meeting date. He noted the wheelchair taxis must compete with the Special Transportation Service vehicles for passengers.

3) Mr. Diago Feliciano, South Florida Taxicab Association, appeared and commented that the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) warned that lease operators would end up with permits for wheelchair and radio-equipped taxis; and those taxis would end up providing service at the airport. He concurred that the lottery system was broken. Mr. Feliciano explained that the lottery concept began with the idea of creating taxicabs for the disabled that were wheelchair accessible; radio-dispatch equipped, and operated 24-hours a day. He spoke in support of Mr. Wood's recommendation to create 38 new wheelchair accessible cabs and emphasized a need to ensure those cabs were made accessible to the drivers.

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Mr. Feliciano noted incentives being explored for encouraging drivers to invest in this service included allowing drivers to transfer or lease their permits after five years.

In response to Commissioner Moss' question regarding whether a specialized fleet of taxicabs could be restricted to wheelchair service calls and prohibited from providing service at the airport, Ms. Peel stated that could be accomplished; however, she pointed out the call volume for wheelchair cabs averaged approximately one hundred per month. She advised that wheelchair cabs could service regular calls, but the Code provided that wheelchair calls be prioritized. She further indicated that more than half of the 65 wheelchair cabs, currently in service, did not subscribe to a radio service. Ms. Peel recommended the Taxicab Ordinance, scheduled for a public hearing at the October 15, 2008 Economic Development & Human Services Committee meeting, be amended to include language creating more wheelchair assessable cabs that were required to be radio-dispatched equipped and prohibited from servicing the airport.

Responding to Chairwoman Edmonson's inquiry as to whether any wheelchair cabs were limited to certain areas, Ms. Peel advised that a small number of cabs were assigned to the North Service Area and the South Miami-Dade Service Area. She explained that those cabs could drop passengers off at any location, but could only pick up passengers in their designated areas.

Chairwoman Edmonson recommended this particular provision be revisited to exempt prohibiting wheelchair cabs from picking up passengers in any area.

4) Mr. Leslie Eisenberg, 3600 N.W. 37th Court, appeared and recommended the next lottery be limited to wheelchair cabs that are required to be radio-dispatched equipped, prohibiting from servicing the airport, and that second drivers be encouraged.

5) Mr. Fabio Montes (phonetic), a South Miami-Dade Service Area wheelchair taxi provider, appeared and spoke in support of the proposed exemption, which allowed wheelchair cabs to pick up passengers outside their designated service areas.

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6) Mr. Pierre Ceac, 2001 N.W. 32nd Street, appeared and recommended taxicab companies should provide radios and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to drivers.

7) Mr. Damian Gregory, 11342 S.W. 163 Street, appeared and suggested the wheelchair taxicabs be integrated into the Special Transportation Services (STS) system as a backup service.

8) Mr. Robert Puentes (phonetic), 927 N.E. 109th Street, appeared and noted that increasing the number of wheelchair cabs would not resolve the foregoing issue; rather would allow those drivers to access areas of heavy call volume and use the STS system.

9) Mr. Joanel Ceremy, 12930 N.W. 21 Avenue, Yellow Cab Driver, appeared and inquired why the future lottery for taxicabs would be limited only to disabled taxicab services and whether taxicab drivers were given the same rights as other people in this city.

Ms. Peel agreed to meet with Mr. Ceremy to address his concerns, which she noted, appeared to be related to other aspects of taxicab driving regulations.

In response to Commissioner Jordan's question as to what processes were used in other parts of the country to ensure wheelchair cab availability, Ms. Peel pointed out that all permits issued in Miami-Dade County for wheelchair cabs were issued through a lottery and discounted \$10,000 off the standard \$25,000 lottery medallion cost. She noted vehicles under those permits could be operated for ten years versus the standard eight years. She further noted that wheelchair cabs were not limited to trips servicing wheelchair passengers, but must prioritize those trips. Regarding methods used in other cities nationwide, Ms. Peel described several approaches used in other cities including methods used in Chicago and New York, but stated she was unaware of any standard system. She advised that she was scheduled to meet with the Transit Department Representatives to discuss the STS component as it related to wheelchair accounts.

Commissioner Jordan asked Ms. Peel to provide her with a report on the outcome of that meeting.

Ms. Peel advised that, with regard to the GPS systems, approximately ten (10) taxi companies

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had radio-dispatched vehicles, but no vehicles were equipped with GPS systems. Regarding Commissioner Jordan's inquiry concerning the impact on auto insurance if wheelchair cabs had a second driver, Ms. Peel noted this issue would need to be explored with the insurance companies, however, forty percent of wheelchair cabs currently had multiple drivers, which was authorized under the Code.

Chairwoman Edmonson asked Ms. Peel to explore the feasibility of making all disabled cabs radio-dispatched, exempting them from the restricted boundaries, and integrating the disabled cab service into the STS system.

2B

082837 Discussion Item**SENIOR DRIVERS AND LOTTERY MEDALLIONS****Presented**

Report: *Chairwoman Edmonson opened the floor for public comment, and the following individual(s) appeared:*

1) *Mr. Niaz Muhammad, 17922 S.W. 145 Avenue, appeared and noted senior cab drivers had no job security or insurance, could not afford the cost to lease the cabs they drove, neither could they afford to retire. He requested the County Commission adopt a policy to assist senior cab drivers.*

2) *Mr. Pierre Francois (phonetic), 16601 N.E. 3rd Avenue, appeared and spoke in opposition to an increase in lease prices and a decrease in the amount of lottery medallions.*

3) *Mr. Leslie Eisenberg, 3600 N.W. 37th Court, asked that the Lottery Ordinance scheduled for public hearing at the next EDHS committee meeting, be deferred pending the outcome of the foregoing item. Responding to Mr. Eisenberg's request, Ms. Peel advised that any changes occurring as a result of that workshop would be applied to whoever was governed by the Taxicab Ordinance and not linked to the lottery itself.*

Chairwoman Edmonson also advised that a request to defer the ordinance could be made at the EDHS Committee meeting, and pointed out that all recommendations made at committee meetings were not automatically accepted.

4) *Mr. Diago Feliciano, South Florida Taxicab Association, spoke in support of senior drivers being recipients of the lottery permits. He also recommended a mechanism be created to ascertain whether the drivers applying as senior drivers had actually been driving cabs during the stated timeframe.*

5) *Mr. Raymond Francois, 1900 N.E. 16th Avenue, appeared and asked if the lottery would be free. He suggested the County open the market to allow lottery winners the opportunity to apply for a bank loan with low interest rates to cover the fees charged.*

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Ms. Peel responded by noting that if this ordinance was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, the same fees that applied to past lotteries, including application and winners' fees, would also apply to the upcoming lottery.

There being no other individuals to speak, Chairwoman Edmonson closed the public hearing.

2C

082838 Discussion Item

DRIVER PROTECTION AND SAFETY DEVICES

Presented

Report: *Chairwoman Edmonson opened the floor for public comment, and the following individual(s) appeared:*

1) *Mr. John Valdez, 5590 S.W. 5th Terrace, appeared and spoke in opposition to cameras being installed in taxi cabs, which he noted would instigate vandalism and robberies, and not enhance safety. He further noted that drivers would be at risk of having their cabs stolen and would be held responsible for the stolen cameras. Mr. Valdez stated partitions in cabs provided a measure of protection, but would not help if the passenger was outside the cab.*

2) *Mr. Humberto Hernandez (phonetic), 3111 NW 27 Avenue, Yellow Cab, spoke in opposition to the installation of cameras in cabs, and noted taxi cab drivers would ultimately pay the cost. He expressed support for partitions in cabs.*

3) *Mr. Robert Fuentes appeared and spoke in opposition to the foregoing proposed ordinance and stated the vehicle would fail inspection if safety devices were installed. He suggested this provision be reflected as optional in this ordinance.*

4) *Mr. Raymond Francois, 1900 N.E. 16th Avenue, spoke in support of installation of protection and safety devices in taxicabs. He recommended the County assist in helping taxicab drivers pay the cost of the installation.*

5) *Mr. Dawood Akhtar, 1735 N.E. 142nd Street, spoke in support of cameras installed in taxicabs, but questioned who would pay for it. He spoke in opposition to partitions installed as well, and asked that these items be optional.*

6) *Mr. Leslie Eisenberg, 3600 N.W. 37th Court, stated that four (4) of his drivers had become victims of tragedies within the last two (2) years, after being radio-dispatched into an ambush. He agreed that the installation of safety devices should be optional to drivers, and that the cameras should be similar to those used by the police department, which record inside and outside of a vehicle.*

7) Mr. Geoffrey Radlein, 21226 S.W. 97th Place, concurred with Mr. Eisenberg's comments that installation of safety devices should be optional. He described an incident in which a partition failed to prevent the driver from being robbed. He also noted the level of comfort would be compromised by the installation of partitions. Mr. Radlein recommended a driver awareness course be offered as an alternative to installing safety devices in the vehicles.

There being no other persons to speak, Chairwoman Edmonson closed the public hearing

In response to Commissioner Moss' inquiry regarding the outcome of mandatory installation of safety systems for taxicabs in other communities, Ms. Cathy Peel, Consumer Services Department Director, noted New York City had reaped positive results by doing so. She also noted Atlanta recently adopted legislation mandating either partitions or cameras. She further noted the responsibility for payment for these systems was generally placed on the medallion or license holder.

Regarding Commissioner Moss' question of whether data existed regarding the impact of these devices on safety, Ms. Peel stated that Seattle had observe a significant decrease in crimes against taxi drivers after installing cameras in taxicabs.

Commissioner Moss asked Ms. Peel to provide him with additional data on how effective safety devices installed in taxicabs had been in other urban areas that made this a requirement. He also asked that Ms. Peel identify any programs that had been established to assist taxi owners/operators with the costs of installation and maintenance of these required safety devices.

Chairwoman Edmonson asked that Ms. Peel include in her findings information regarding alternative approaches to prevent these costs from trickling down to the drivers.

Ms. Peel noted she would research and report back her findings to the Committee regarding the concerns expressed by Chairwoman Edmonson and Commissioner Moss.

2D

082839 Discussion Item

TAXICAB CHAUFFEUR HEALTH INSURANCE

Presented

Report: *Chairwoman Edmonson opened the floor for public comment, and the following individual(s) appeared:*

1) *Mr. Gilbert Hernandez (phonetic), 3111 N.W. 27th Avenue, expressed concerns regarding the high cost of health insurance.*

2) *Mr. John Valdez, 5590 S.W. 5th Terrace, appeared and spoke about the mismanagement of funds by insurance companies and the difficulties that taxicab drivers had in obtaining health insurance due to the costs and risks involved.*

3) *Mr. Powa Meus (phonetic), 16606 N.E. 3 Avenue, President, Dade Cab Foundation, Inc. (DCF), appeared and distributed to committee members a letter from DCF providing statistics and proposing a plan that addressed the critical health insurance needs facing the taxicab industry.*

4) *Mr. Joanel Ceremy, 12930 N.W. 21 Avenue, Yellow Cab Driver, appeared and expressed concern with the high costs of leasing cabs in Miami-Dade County. He requested the County Commission assist taxicab drivers in addressing these costs.*

5) *Mr. Raymond Francois, 1900 N.E. 16th Avenue, appeared and noted owners of taxi companies continued to increase lease rates and collect insurance payments from drivers, but refused to pay claims filed by drivers for accidents. He questioned the status of funds generated from advertisements placed on taxicab vehicles, and he suggested the County assume the advertising contracts, and use the proceeds to insure drivers.*

6) *Mr. Niaz Muhammad, 17922 S.W. 145 Avenue, appeared and requested the County to reduce the costs taxicab drivers were required to pay to operate their vehicles, to relieve their stress and enable them to purchase health insurance.*

7) *Mr. Dawood Akhtar, 1735 N.E. 142nd Street, appeared and stated he previously offered taxicab drivers the opportunity to purchase life insurance*

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at seventy-five cents per day, but the drivers requested their car insurance rates be reduced in lieu of purchasing the life insurance. He noted drivers must be willing to help themselves.

8) Mr. Pierre Ceac, 2001 N.W. 32nd Street, appeared and stated he paid \$310 every month for auto insurance, but received no proceeds from his policy towards the purchase of another cab when his cab was demolished in a crash. He advised that he was a member of the Taxi Driver's Association that wished to work together with the County to develop policy for insuring taxicab drivers.

9) Mr. Robert Fuentes appeared and addressed the importance of taxi drivers carrying life insurance. He requested a provision requiring life insurance be included in the ordinance to assist the families of drivers who pass away.

10) Mr. Pierre Francois (phonetic), 16601 N.E. 3rd Avenue, appeared and urged the County Commission to support providing assistance to taxicab drivers for the purchase of health and life insurance.

11) Mr. Ernst Derizer, 830 N.W. 143rd Street, appeared and noted health insurance was more urgently needed than life insurance, which depended on the companies. (I'm not sure what this means "which depended on the companies- are you referring to life insurance? It's not too clear to me, and might need to be reworded)

There being no other individuals to appear, Chairman Edmonson closed the public hearing.

Pursuant to the committee's request that research be conducted on health insurance issues related to taxi cab drivers, Ms. Peel noted staff explored several options and determined the new Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS) Low-Cost Health Insurance product appeared the best option for taxicab chauffeurs to obtain health insurance. Staff also looked at the State of Florida's newly adopted health insurance program, Ms. Peel noted. She further noted staff did not recommend that taxicab chauffeurs be covered under the County's health insurance program. Ms. Peel pointed out that two separate issues regarding availability and affordability had been raised. She explained that the BC/BS program addressed the issue of availability; however, it did not resolve the issue of how to pay for the insurance.

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Chairwoman Edmonson announced that the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Low-Cost Health Insurance Program, recently adopted by the County Commission, was available to anyone who desired it. She noted a report had been provided regarding the fees and coverage information that was available to everyone.

Ms. Peel noted Florida Statutes exempted taxicabs from Personal Injury Protection (PIP) coverage; however, a possible alternative was being considered. She explained that the Taxi, Limousine and the Para Transit Association, together with the American International Group, Inc. (AIG), had put together a product similar to PIP coverage, but at a much lower cost.

2E

082894 Discussion Item

TAXICAB FUEL EFFICIENCY PHASE-IN

Presented

Report: *Chairwoman Edmonson opened the floor for public comment, and the following individual(s) appeared:*

1) *Mr. Diago Feliciano, South Florida Taxicab Association, appeared and expressed concern with this item being brought forth at this time, since the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) had determined a decision on this issue would be premature before conducting research on how New York City and other major cities addressed this issue. He noted most of the taxicabs were used vehicles acquired from police departments and other governmental agencies, which limited options for obtaining newer fuel-efficient vehicles. Mr. Feliciano further noted that during the discussion of the previous EDHS Taxicab Workshop, a decision was made to defer this issue, in light of the current economic situation. He emphasized that taxicab drivers in Miami-Dade County earned less than their counterparts in New York City, and should not be forced to purchase hybrid or fuel-efficient vehicles at this time. Mr. Feliciano noted if drivers were able to purchase these specialized vehicles, they would need to have them repaired by the dealers.*

2) *Mr. Georffrey Radlein, 21226 S.W. 97th Place, appeared and requested this issue be deferred until more research and analyses could be done to determine performance measures and durability of the subject fuel-efficient vehicles.*

3) *Mr. Jose Fuentes, Chairman, Alternative Fuels and Transportation Subcommittee under the Greenhouse Gas Committee, 2665 S. Bayshore Drive, appeared and clarified that the ordinance sponsored by the BCC Chairman, did not specify that the subject fuel-efficient vehicles were "Hybrids." He pointed out the intent of the Climate Control Advisory Task Force was to increase the fuel efficiency of vehicles. He explained that most of the proposed fuel-efficient vehicles were being sold at affordable prices and the subcommittee compiled a list of recommended vehicles for use by the cab industry.*

4) *Mr. John Valdez, 5590 S.W. 5th Terrace, appeared and advised that the maintenance of*

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hybrid and fuel-efficient vehicles was more costly than for other vehicles. He stated he would not purchase used police cars because they were abused and required more maintenance.

5) Mr. Raymond Francois, 1900 N.E. 16th Avenue, appeared and inquired whether the County would buy out the taxi owner's current vehicle loans.

6) Mr. Robert Fuentes appeared and spoke in opposition to the proposed ordinance, and noted this was not the proper time to introduce this issue.

7) Mr. Leslie Eisenberg, 3600 N.W. 37th Court, appeared and expressed his view that the cost of this fuel-efficient vehicle phase-in would be paid for by the ridership, which would increase fares significantly. He asked that this item be deferred.

8) Mr. Pierre Ceac, 2001 N.W. 32nd Street, appeared and spoke in opposition to the fuel efficiency phase-in proposal.

9) Mr. Esau Mardy, 14911 N.E. 9th Court, appeared and inquired about the status of the issue regarding automobile insurance coverage for taxi drivers, discussed at the previous taxicab workshop.

10) Mr. Jean Mitu Pierre-Louis (phonetic), 20281 S.W. 110th Court, appeared and spoke on the issues of added features causing values to decrease for taxicabs, and of drivers paying for insurance premiums, but not receiving coverage for their vehicles.

11) Mr. Angel Gonzalez, 15000 N.W. 79th Avenue, appeared and inquired about the number of taxicab chauffeurs currently in Miami-Dade County, to which Ms. Peel responded the number of taxicab chauffeurs in Miami-Dade County was approximately 4,200. Mr. Gonzalez continued by noting that approximately 95% of those chauffeurs did not receive notice of today's workshop.

There being no other individuals to speak, the floor was closed to public comment.

Commissioner Moss asked staff to explore the natural progression of older vehicles being replaced by later models, and to determine whether this issue of phasing in fuel-efficient cars would resolve itself unassisted, over time.

Ms. Peel advised that staff would work with the Climate Change Advisory Task Force and the industry representatives to obtain responses to Commissioner Moss' request. She pointed out that a Supplemental Item containing additional information, and providing a matrix of the types of vehicles that meet the standards under the proposed ordinance, would be presented at the next EDHS Committee meeting.

Chairwoman Edmonson noted he perceived the major concern raised by the taxicab industry as being that of the drivers ultimately being responsible for paying all the costs associated with the recommendations presented today. She advised her main focus, while drafting legislation based on recommendations presented in these taxicab workshops, would be on costs passed on to the drivers,. Chairwoman Edmonson noted once the ordinances were issued, industry representatives would have a chance to express their positions during the public hearing for each issue.

3 ADJOURNMENT

Report: *There being no further business to come before the EDHS Committee, the Taxicab Workshop was adjourned at 4:26 p.m.*