



**Special Task Force to Reduce Inefficiencies in Procurement (STRIP)**

**Location: Stephen P. Clark Center, 111 NW 1st St, Miami, FL 33128, 19th Floor**

**Date: December 18, 2025 - Time: 10:00 a.m.**

**Meeting Minutes**

Start: 10:01 am  
Stop: 12: 18 p.m.

Appointed: 15  
Quorum: 8

<b>Members Present (7)</b>	<b>Members Absent (8)</b>
Aldo Leiva	Albert "Al" Dotson, Jr. ( <b>ZOOM</b> )
Carolina Vester	Jina Marie Braynon ( <b>ABSENT</b> )
Chairwoman Diana Mendez	Josenrique Cueto ( <b>ABSENT</b> )
Erin Hendrix	Maira Suarez ( <b>ABSENT</b> )
John Elizabeth Aleman	Miguel De Grandy ( <b>ZOOM</b> )
Kenneth Naylor	Rey T. Melendi ( <b>ABSENT</b> )
Victor Herrera	Rudy Ortiz ( <b>ABSENT</b> )
	Willy Bermello ( <b>ZOOM</b> )

**Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order with a brief welcome and acknowledgment of attendees who wished to speak. Chairwoman Diana Mendez then requested introductions. Introductions were given by task force members, staff, and Zoom participants and the County Attorney’s Office was also represented, with Eddie Gonzalez noted.

**Reasonable Opportunity for the Public to be Heard**

Lawanda Wright (SBE Outreach/Education Section Chief)

Lawanda emphasized SBE’s responsibility to protect and expand opportunities for local firms. She cautioned that self-certification could increase fraud risk without proper audits and safeguards. She noted that SBE is already working to streamline certification and reduce processing times and strongly opposed removing the project review process, stating it is critical for identifying capacity issues and setting appropriate goals to protect local firms.

W. McIntyre (Small Business Owner)

Mr. McIntyre expressed strong opposition to self-certification, stating it could open the door to fraud. He emphasized that certification requires essential documentation, such as an EIN and proof of legitimacy, and should not be replaced with a simple affidavit-style process.

Cherise Chester – Creative Vision Media

Ms. Chester supported maintaining the certification process, highlighting its benefits. She noted that certification confirms a firm’s legitimacy and commercially useful function, provides guidance in navigating procurement, and adds credibility and marketing value beyond County work.

John Voyne (Goods & Services SBE)

John shared a personal success story, explaining how participation in the SBE program contributed to his business growth. He credited the program with enabling him to expand operations, hire family members, and grow his workforce.

Jerry Lazar – TriMerge Consulting Group

Mr. Lazar opposed replacing certification with self-certification and recommended focusing on streamlining rather than elimination. He suggested simplifying documentation requirements and improving processing timelines through technology while maintaining necessary verification controls.

Mariana (Ultra)

Mariana expressed confusion regarding the recommendations and emphasized the need for clearer explanations. While she supported faster certification, she cautioned against a process that could negatively impact firms if certification is later revoked due to paperwork or administrative issues.

Task force members clarified that there was no intent to eliminate the SBE program. The self-certification concept was described as a potential tool to accelerate time-to-business while maintaining safeguards such as audits and verification. They were encouraged to tie their comments to specific recommendations to ensure clarity and accurate consideration.

The attendees raised concerns about not receiving direct notices or email communications regarding meetings. The County Attorney's Office clarified that all meetings are properly noticed on the County calendar in accordance with legal requirements, meetings are open to the public, and minutes are maintained, though they may not always be posted online. It was also noted that there is no legal requirement to email every business. Staff explained that there is an internal system that allows blast emails to certified firms (SBEs), but not to the public. Participants expressed a preference for establishing a dedicated website page or central hub for STRIP materials to reduce missed communications and improve consistency. Staff will work to create a centralized online location for STRIP information and materials and distribute communications by sharing the link.

## **Small Business Advisory Board Representatives**

### **A&E Advisory Board (Juan Crespi, Chair)**

Mr. Crespi explained that Architecture & Engineering (A&E) operates differently from construction and goods/services and should not be treated as a single category. Contract tracking and participation data show disparities across disciplines, with engineering participation typically higher than architecture. He raised the concern regarding Recommendation #12, specifically the proposal to standardize SBE utilization requirements at 10% for task-based contracts and 15% for

defined-scope contracts. It was noted that standardized goals can unintentionally become a ceiling and that removing project-by-project evaluation may reduce meaningful participation opportunities for SBEs. The importance of set-asides was emphasized as an effective tool to address underrepresentation, and certain departments, WASD and Jackson Health were highlighted as examples of strong small business engagement. Additionally, enforcing “locally headquartered” requirements was stressed as critical to protecting program integrity and preventing abuse.

### **Debbie Swain – A&E Advisory Board (Civil Engineering)**

Debbie Swain emphasized the importance of small business enterprises (SBEs) in supporting local economic reinvestment and workforce development, noting that SBEs play a critical role in keeping dollars and jobs within the community. She raised several concerns, including reduced participation goals, the reduced or near elimination of “Verification of Availability” notifications/surveys, and the lack of meaningful engagement with the SBE community earlier in the STRIP process. She stated that these issues could negatively impact small business participation if not addressed. Ms. Swain requested that the STRIP Task Force consider an extension of its term or additional engagement opportunities to allow for deeper collaboration and direct input from the SBE community. She also encouraged streamlining the certification process and providing mentorship to SBEs, rather than eliminating certification altogether. During the discussion, clarification was provided regarding Verification of Availability/market availability. It was noted that if standard utilization goals are adopted, the need to survey every project may be reduced; however, market availability surveys remain valuable in determining when higher participation goals (20–25% or more) are appropriate.

### **Namita Uppal**

Ms. Uppal responded to the concerns raised by reiterating that the merger of functions was an administrative decision, and that supporting small businesses remains a priority within the procurement process. She confirmed that her team strictly enforces locally headquartered requirements and that certain procurement programs are intentionally designed to promote small business participation. She clarified that the proposed 10% and 15% utilization percentages were intended to serve as a minimum baseline (a floor), not a ceiling, and that higher participation goals can still be set when market conditions support them. Ms. Uppal also confirmed that market availability outreach continues to be part of the process and emphasized that staff is open to feedback and recommendations on safeguards and improvements moving forward.

### **SBE Construction Advisory Board**

#### **Dorothy Brown Alfaro - SBE Construction Advisory Board**

Dorothy Brown Alfaro spoke on behalf of the SBE Construction Advisory Board and as a long-time small business advocate. She emphasized the history and intent of the SBE program, explaining that it was created to ensure fair access to County contracting and later structured as a race- and

gender-neutral program. She highlighted the impact of recent state-level changes, noting that the elimination of participation goals has weakened small business participation on large construction projects and removed important wage protections. She stressed that small businesses hire locally, reinvest in the community, and are negatively affected when large out-of-area firms dominate major projects.

Dorothy outlined ongoing challenges facing small construction firms, including bonding limits, delayed payments (including change orders), lack of enforcement of prompt payment requirements, and limited leverage when working under large prime contractors. She also raised concerns about bid shopping on mega projects, pointing to the Miami-Dade County Public Schools model requiring sealed subcontractor bids as a best practice. She expressed concern that small businesses were not sufficiently engaged early in the STRIP process and encouraged stronger collaboration with existing SBE advisory boards. While acknowledging STRIP's goal of improving efficiency, she urged the Task Force to consider how changes may impact small businesses and to ensure efficiency efforts do not unintentionally undermine access, fairness, or long-standing protections for local firms.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will work to create or identify a central location (such as a website or landing page) where the public can easily access key STRIP materials, including the resolution establishing the Task Force, adopted meeting minutes, preliminary and adopted recommendations, a clearly labeled running list of recommendations, and instructions on how and where to submit feedback. In addition, Michou Jean will be identified as the primary staff liaison for public feedback.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Special Task Force to Reduce Inefficiencies in Procurement (STRIP), the meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m.