



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD

June 11, 2025, at 3:00 PM

[www.fortlauderdale.gov/government/edab](http://www.fortlauderdale.gov/government/edab)

Meeting Minutes

Board Members	Attendance	Present	Absent
Enrique Bargioni, Chair	P	8	0
Russ Klenet, Vice Chair	P	7	1
Jay Adams	A	7	1
William Feinberg	P	6	1
Nicholas Kollias	P	8	0
Marianna S. DeJager	P	8	0
Allyson Meyers	P	7	1
Jason Hughes	A	3	3
Haley Dowling	P	4	0
Kymrae Mizell-Hill	P	2	1

**Staff**

- Von Howard, Administrative Supervisor (Present)
- Daphnee Sainvil, Public Affairs Division Manager (Present)
- Ashley Dixon, Management Analyst (Not Present)
- Melissa Mata, Management Fellow (Present)
- Ben Sorensen, District 4 City Commissioner

**I. Call to Order & Determination of Quorum**

Chair, Enrique Bargioni, called the meeting to order at 3:04 PM. Roll call was issued, and it was noted that quorum was established.

**II. Introduction of Members**

Member DeJager, suggested starting the meeting with member introductions as the board has two new members. The Board Members agreed and each member including city liaisons introduced themselves. New board member, Dr. Kymrae Mizell-Hill – appointed by Commissioner Beasley-Pittman, shared her background in organizational leadership and deep family roots in Fort Lauderdale and Broward County, expressing gratitude to serve on the Board. New board member, Haley Dowling, a real estate professional appointed by Commissioner Sorensen, noted that this was her first in-person meeting after attending virtually. Vice Chair Klenet, joined at 3:08 p.m. and introduced himself.

**III. Approval of Minutes**

Chair, Enrique Bargioni, carried out a motion to approve the EDAB Minutes from the meeting that took place on Wednesday, June 11, 2025. Motion moved by Member DeJager and seconded by Member Dowling. Motion passed; EDAB Minutes were approved at 3:10 PM.

**IV. Guest Speaker, District 4 City Commissioner Ben Sorensen**

Commissioner Ben Sorensen, from District 4, joined the meeting at 3:11 p.m. as the featured

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guest speaker. Chair Bargioni, introduced the Commissioner by mentioning a few facts from his biography. Commissioner Sorensen was well greeted by the members. After Chair Bargioni introduced the Commissioner, he started the discussion by addressing the City's rapid growth of 50% in the past 10 years. The first question asked to Commissioner Sorensen was on his take as to where we are going as a city. Commissioner Sorensen thanked the Board Chair for introducing him and responded by noting that the city has performed exceptionally well over the last decade but must remain proactive in diversifying its economy and recruiting top-tier employers.

The Commissioner emphasized the need for a more intentional focus on city-specific economic development efforts, beyond the broader county efforts led by the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, the Chambers of Commerce, and other organizations. Member DeJager asked the Commissioner if the City provides any incentives to attract big companies and to provide them with a better quality of life for their employees. Commissioner Sorensen mentioned that the City does not provide incentives; Public Affairs Division Manager, Daphnee Sainvil joined the discussion by stating the city has internally been working on identifying potential incentives for the business community, specifically in the commercial and retail industries.

Member Klenet transitioned the conversation by stating most employers are attracted to cities with a good educational system. He continued to mention educational infrastructure – particularly with elementary schools, has been a challenge for the City of Fort Lauderdale. He continued the discussion by mentioning past meeting topics and guest speakers the EDAB Board Members have discussed to increase economic development growth such as:

1. Solving educational infrastructure
2. The need for AI employers in the City; including universities with innovation centers
3. Strengthening current opportunities
4. Thriving and supporting the tourism industry by working with travel writers and influencers for marketing and attraction strategies to bring in bedrock businesses
5. Learning about City and County permitting and license process for small business owners

Member Feinberg brought back the discussion of educational infrastructure by mentioning he attended a meeting of the Council of Economic Advisors from the Chamber of Commerce. The meeting mentioned how schools are now investing in AI for public education. Board members stated that there are schools in the city that need to close down and be repurposed. A discussion continued on the availability of land to build public schools and the need to have a public school in the Downtown area. Discussion then transitioned to improve post-secondary schools to reduce the concerns of positions being removed due to AI implementation. Commissioner Sorensen ensured the board members he has been working with universities to maximize educational opportunities.

Chair Bargioni, suggested if a meeting could be continued with the key leaders that can help move

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this issue forward. The discussion moved forward to mentioning the different startups in the city starting with the multiple startups from Israel. Ms. Sainvil announced the City is actively solidifying relationships with domestic and international partners - leveraging our sister city relationships – to bring businesses to the city.

Chair Bargioni proposed the board members to identify ten companies that the city could contact in order to grow and expand business ecosystem. Member DeJager asked Ms. Sainvil what strategies the City is actively doing to attract companies. Ms. Sainvil ensured the Board Members of internal conversations that have been made by the Mayor and City Staff with different companies and organizations like the Florida Council of 100, to bring in new companies. She noted the city must first determine its identity; type of companies to attract; and whether the city can meet the needs of the companies.

Member Kollias joined the discussion by stating that his focus on the EDAB Board is on safety and security and homelessness, he continued to ask the Commissioner about his thoughts of improving the unhoused situation and the revitalization of downtown areas. Commissioner Sorensen responded by stating the City owned properties and is looking for collaborations to build new facilities to help with revitalization. He mentioned the proposed rezoning of Himmarshee and additional changes that will assist with improving the safety of the residents. He then transitioned to respond to homelessness by stating the city needs to create a safe space for the unhoused to find services. Member Feinberg jumped in by saying the City needs “engagement centers” to provide case management support and have multiple engagement centers around the city. Members begin to identify community resources for the unhoused from different organizations. Ms. Sainvil intervened by reminding the Board Members can make recommendations to the City Commission in order for Staff to be directed by the City Manager to proceed with working on projects and or programs. She continued to mention the President issued an executive order focused on eliminating the Housing First model and focus more on mental health and substance abuse wraparound services. Because the city already focuses on these priorities, the city can not only be eligible for federal grants, but also state grants as well. A member asked if there is a board that addresses and discusses homelessness issues, City Liaisons and the Commissioner confirmed that there is a Homeless Advisory Committee.

Commissioner Sorensen brought back the conversation by mentioning next steps of having one board member join him with K-8 leaders to address the issues discussed at today’s meeting. Chair Bargioni joined in by appointing Vice Chair Klenet to be part of that meeting. Vice Chair Klenet accepted. Member Allyson Meyers stated that the city must understand what they can compete against when comparing to the incentives and attractions of other nearby cities. Chair Bargioni proposed to invite three companies to a meeting to understand what they need; and also identify three new companies that are not located in Fort Lauderdale. Ms. Sainvil mentioned the prioritization workshop would be the best time to make suggestions to the City Commission for



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economic development to be a top priority of conversation.

The meeting began to wrap up by stating next steps:

1. City Staff (after coordinating with the City Manager) and Commissioner Sorensen provide names of three companies located in the City of Fort Lauderdale and the names of three companies operating outside City limits.
2. Have City Staff work with Susan Leon to meet with the Education Advisory Board to have conversations about educational options for new infrastructure, like universities and possible innovation center in the city.

Ms. Sainvil stated the City has contacted the new Director of the Alan Levan Center to discuss partnerships as well as with big companies to understand their needs. Ms. Sainvil mentioned the City will improve the communications with the Board Members and the community regarding these discussions. Members agreed to the need for an innovation center to be located in the downtown area. Member Klenet asked Commissioner Sorensen about parcels owned by the City. Commissioner Sorensen responded by saying the City is having conversations with Stiles to understand their options for the Riverwalk City Garage.

With that conversation taking place, Commissioner Sorensen excused himself due to another commitment. The guest speaker agenda item concluded.

#### **V. Division Reports**

Ms. Sainvil provided an update on the StartUP FTL program, which is designed to help entrepreneurs and small business owners to launch, plan, and grow their business within the City of Fort Lauderdale. Formerly branded as BEAMs, the program has been rebranded and is now on its third cohort.

Recently, the original 12-week program was divided into two cohorts creating the StartUP FTL Accelerated Program funded by the National League of Cities through their \$20,000 grant award. The grant is to assist individuals in communities where economic advancement opportunities are available to those within the AMI of 200%. Half the grant funds will be used to award StartUP FTL participants in a pitch competition. A more advanced Grow Cohort is currently open for businesses operating for one to five years and focuses on strengthening branding, marketing, and business operations.

Staff also highlighted the other half of the grant will also cover microgrants ranging from \$100 to \$850 to help entrepreneurs cover small, but critical, business expenses. These grants will be



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distributed on a first-come, first-served basis and can help solidify operational elements such as supplies or business operations and equipment. Ms. Sainvil continued to mention the microgrants were administered with the assistance of the Economic Recovery Fellow. The ERC Fellow, Servola Frazier, successfully implemented a pilot branding campaign that may be replicated in other economically stagnant corridors like Himmarshee and North Beach.

Under general updates, Ms. Sainvil restated that they are actively meeting with CEOs — often alongside the Mayor — to understand what companies need in order to grow or relocate in Fort Lauderdale. These discussions currently happen outside of the other Commissioners' purview but will commit to improving communication back to the board and the broader Commission to ensure alignment. The objective is to anticipate business needs and tailor Fort Lauderdale's incentive offerings to remain competitive with other states such as Tennessee, North Carolina, or Georgia.

Finally, staff noted that the City's annual business survey has received no responses to date. Ms. Sainvil mentioned there are 25,000 active businesses and requested EDAB's assistance in spreading the word. Staff agreed to send the Board Members information regarding the Business Survey, StartUpFTL Grow Cohort, and Microgrant details. To wrap up the Division Reports, Ms. Mata, reminded the Board Members of the Recommendation to the City Commission submitted for the City Commission on August 19th. City Liaison reminded Member DeJager was the one assigned to represent the Board. Ms. DeJager mentioned she can be there, however, noted she has a meeting to 2:00pm and must leave the Conference meeting early.

**VI. Areas of Concentration**

There were no reports or updates provided by the members.

**VII. Member Reports**

There were no reports provided by the members.

**VIII. Meeting adjourned at 4:39 PM.**

With no further business, Chair Bargioni motioned to adjourn the meeting. The motion was made by Member DeJager and seconded by Member Meyers. The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 PM.

**The next EDAB meeting will be on September 10, 2025, at DSD Building.**

*Any written public comments made 48 hours prior to the meeting regarding items discussed during the proceedings have been attached hereto.*