



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD

February 11, 2026, at 3:00 PM

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

Meeting Minutes

Board Members	Attendance	Present	Absent
Russ Klenet, Chair	P	2	0
William Feinberg, Vice Chair	P	2	0
Nicholas Kollias	A	1	1
Marianna S. DeJager	A	1	1
Allyson Meyers	P	2	0
Jason Hughes	P	2	0
Haley Dowling	P	2	0
Kymrae Mizell-Hill	P	2	0

**Staff**

- Von Howard, Administrative Supervisor (Present)
- Porshia Garcia, Community Services Department Director (Not Present)
- Katrina Johnson, Interim Asst. Community Services Department Director (Present)
- Melissa Mata, Management Analyst (Present)

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

Board Chair, Russel Klenet, called the meeting to order at 3:14 PM. Roll call was issued, and it was noted that quorum was established.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Vice Chair, Mr. Klenet, carried out a motion to approve the EDAB Minutes from the meeting that took place on Wednesday, January 14, 2026. Motion moved by Member Jason Hugues and seconded by Vice Chair Feinberg. Motion passed; EDAB Minutes were approved at 3:16 PM. The scheduled guest speaker was postponed.

**III. Motion to Discuss Holding Special Meeting on February 27, 2026 with City Manager, Rickelle Williams, and Assistant City Manager, Christopher Cooper**

The purpose of the Special Meeting is to host City Manager, Rickelle Williams, and Deputy City Manager, Chris Cooper, and to provide them with substantive feedback and recommendations from the Board. Members were encouraged to identify specific economic development concerns and proposed solutions to guide that discussion.

The Board began with an open conversation regarding small business challenges. Members expressed concern that the City’s business licensing and permitting processes are not sufficiently agile for small businesses. While staff presentations have described the system as streamlined and user-friendly, several members indicated that feedback from business owners suggests otherwise. The Board discussed whether other Florida municipalities have more efficient systems and acknowledged that although Fort Lauderdale may be ahead of some cities in terms of digital access to permitting information, there may be gaps in communication and user experience.

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Members emphasized that the issue may not solely be process difficulty, but rather awareness and accessibility of available tools. The City's platform provides information regarding fees, certificates of occupancy, and required permits; however, business owners may not know these resources exist. Marketing and outreach were identified as key areas for improvement. The Board discussed whether the City is effectively communicating assistance programs and whether additional visibility efforts could improve outcomes.

The Board also discussed business retention concerns, noting observations that businesses appear to close within three years of opening. Members emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing barriers that may contribute to this trend.

Traffic congestion near the Omni Convention Center and along A1A/A17 was discussed as a significant economic issue, particularly during large events. Members expressed concern that traffic delays could negatively affect event organizers, tourism, and overall economic impact. The Board recommended improved coordination between the City and Broward County, particularly with respect to law enforcement presence, traffic management, and signage. A suggestion was made to have the City work with the County to improve short-term coordination and pursue a long-term solution, especially in advance of major upcoming international events.

The Board further discussed office occupancy and workforce trends, noting that a substantial portion of the workforce has returned to in-person work. Members recommended that the City Manager be asked to direct staff to work with commercial real estate entities to strengthen Class A office occupancy and business attraction efforts.

Education was identified as a critical economic development factor. Members shared that when companies consider relocation, questions about school quality and options are often central. The Board discussed potential partnerships with charter school operators and opportunities to explore available land for educational use. Members suggested inviting the Chief Education Officer and representatives from Nova Southeastern University to a future meeting to discuss charter school development and the need for student-centered spaces in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

The future of the Himmarshee district was also discussed. Members referenced previous public concerns, ordinance changes regarding open container regulations, and ongoing challenges related to perception and safety. The Board discussed potential redevelopment strategies and the broader vision for growth south of the river.

As part of preparation for the Special Meeting, the Board identified five priority discussion areas:

1. Availability of Class A Office Space
2. Education Options & Workforce Alignment

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3. Overview of the Himmarshee District
4. 17th Street Causeway Traffic Bottlenecks
5. Investment & Promotion of City Systems and Tools

**IV. Areas of Concentration**

Under Areas of Concentration, the Board discussed whether formal designations remain necessary. Vice Chair Feinberg noted that the original intent was to create a clear point of contact for reporting purposes. However, Member Dr. Mizell recommended removing specific designations and instead allowing members to raise issues of concern during this portion of the agenda. The Board agreed that moving forward, members may raise topics not limited to any specific area of concentration.

**V. Member Discussion**

During Member Discussion, Vice Chair Bill referenced the Economic Council breakfast events and highlighted the continued economic strength of major events such as the annual Boat Show, which generates significant revenue and reinforces tourism as a key economic engine. The Board discussed inviting the Director of Tourism to provide a presentation on the Convention Center, potential incentive recommendations, and opportunities for City support in collaboration with Visit Lauderdale. Member Hughes also recommended inviting representatives from the film industry, including Sandy Lighterman and Phill Lapp from the County's Cultural Affairs Division, to discuss available incentives and partnership opportunities.

**VI. Staff Reports**

Staff provided updates on SizeUp FTL, Neighbor Support Night, and Sistrunk Community Talks. The Board requested that a calendar invitation be circulated and that members provide availability for March meeting dates to host special meeting.

**VII. Meeting adjourned at 4:18 PM.**

With no further business, Chair Klenet motioned to adjourn the meeting. The motion was made by Member Hughes and seconded by Member Mizell-Hill. The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 PM.

**The next EDAB meeting will be on March 11, 2026, at DSD Building.**

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