

**MANATEE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION  
BRADENTON CONVENTION CENTER  
One Haban Boulevard  
Palmetto, Florida  
April 8, 2026**

Meeting video link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUlgjuGhS-qV966RU2Z7AtA>


Present were:

Tal Siddique, Chairman District 3  
Amanda Ballard, First Vice-Chairman District 2  
George Kruse, Second Vice-Chairman, District 7  
Dr. Bob McCann, District 5, attending by Zoom  
Jason Bearden, District 6, attending by Zoom  
Mike Rahn, District 4

District 1 seat is vacant.

Present were:


Charlie Bishop, County Administrator  
Pamela D'Agostino, County Attorney  
Robin Toth, Deputy Clerk, Clerk of the Circuit Court


 Chairman Siddique called the work session to order at 9:04 a.m.

**INVOCATION**

 Commissioner Ballard delivered the invocation.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

 Chairman Siddique led the Pledge of Allegiance.

 (Enter Commissioner McCann by Zoom)

**AGENDA AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKSESSION OUTLINE**

BC20260408DOC001

Agenda Update Memorandum 1 (4/6/26)

BC20260408DOC002

- Item 1, Economic Development Workshop providing an Overview of Economic Development Strategies, Affordable Housing Policy, Workforce Initiatives, and Planning Tools Supporting Long-Term Growth in Manatee County – Updated to revise the attached agenda to reflect (a) Jamie M. Smith, Associate VP of Government Relation/PIO, State College of Florida (SCF), Manatee-Sarasota, instead of James Smith, Manatee Technical College, (b) PowerPoint Presentations, and (c) Public Comment

Public comment was received after the printing of the agenda

BC20260408DOC003


Item 8 is a duplicate printing of Item 2 and was disregarded.


**GOVERNMENT RELATIONS/WORKSESSION OVERVIEW**


Stephanie Garrison, Government Relations Director, stated the purpose of today's work session is to provide the Board with an overview of key economic development strategies and initiatives relevant to Manatee County. The morning session will conclude with question-and-answer discussion. The afternoon session will feature updates on regional and local initiatives, including Suncoast Prosper presentation by Jamie M. Smith of SCF, Upskill Manatee presentation by Joshua Matlock of CareerSource Suncoast, and discussion of Opportunity Zones, affordable housing, and economic development incentives.

**BC MB FY25-26/1**

1. **INCENTIVIZING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**


 Dr. Nathan Palardy, University of Florida, utilized a slide presentation on the common perception of economic development incentives, waves of economic development strategy thinking, industry recruitment, cumulative strategies that build on each other, relevant ideas today, business retention and entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship and job creation, U.S. transition toward a service-producing economy, What about Florida, What about Manatee, rise of business retention and expansion programs, public-private partnerships and growing industry clusters, being strategic about local resources, aerospace clusters in Florida at deep water Ports, what industry clusters exist and how to maintain them, place-making as an economic development strategy, examples of place-making as community economic development, place-making attracts the people that attract development, early childhood education and care is needed for young professionals to stay in the labor force, support for entrepreneurs, Manatee County Economic Development Incentives, County initiatives, an accessible County dashboard to help counties track economic development progress, data centers, increasing demand for AI services and public backlash are forcing companies to negotiate better deals.

 (Enter Commissioner Bearden by Zoom)


 Discussion ensued regarding a massive employer and government employment, how clusters are formed, lack of a talent pool to sustain clusters, Manatee County has not positioned itself for the workforce of tomorrow, where is the biggest impact, educate workforce to retain them and make it affordable to live here, the need to create an urban core to retain a younger workforce for the future, opportunities to create trade jobs, coordinate local efforts to create a pipeline, and Commissioners would be surveyed to assess today's activities.

BC20260408DOC004


2. **AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY**

 Ali Ankudowich, American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), presented slides to address local housing solutions across Florida counties, the Florida Housing Coalition, strategies for housing, strategies of focus today, revival of starter homes by right, revive the starter home, small scale options, House Bill 399 (Building Permits and Inspections Allowing Factory-Built Homes), strategies for lot rental assistance, minimum lot size reform, proposed Senate Bill 594 (Local Housing Assistance Plans), local zoning incentives in view of State law, optional and mandatory zoning allowances for affordable housing, optional YIGBY (Yes-In-God's-Backyard) as a tool empowering localities to unlock faith-based land, and existing Live Local Act land use mandate in a nutshell.


**RECESS/RECONVENE:** 10:19 a.m. – 10:35 a.m. All Commissioners were present, including Commissioners Bearden and McCann by Zoom.


 Ms. Ankudowich continued with slides regarding four projects locally so far with Live Local Land Act (LLA) use mandate entitlements, HB 1389 (Redondo) Affordable Housing Amendments to the Live Local Land Use Mandate, local YIGBY option covers more ground, additional local incentive options for affordable housing, sustain and expand local housing funds, local housing trust funds are highly flexible, target subsidies to where they are needed most, investing in public land can help stretch subsidies, local option tax exemption for affordable housing applies to development of 50+ units with at least 20 percent affordable at 60 percent Annual Median Income (AMI) or below, public land and


Community Land Trusts (CLTS), use public land for public good, example partnerships with CLTS, and local policy toolkit for affordable housing.


 There was discussion regarding places where starter homes by right have been used as a strategy for infill development, and public land versus CLTS. BC20260408DOC005

3. **PLANNING AND FORM-BASED CODES**

 Professor Thomas Hawkins, JD, AICP, utilized a slide presentation on form-based codes to align with community objectives and foster long-term growth, State of Florida Chapter 89-393 and House Bill 450, Environmental and Community Development Clinic, traditional neighborhood, typical subdivision cul-de-sacs and well-connected street network, examples of form-based code adopted by Florida communities, regulation of built environment, consumer demand for certain land uses and urban design, and walkable communities.


 Discussion ensued regarding the economic impact of having a highway to use for freight logistics, there is a negative aspect to the roadways, and a lot of transportation demands could be handled by other transit investments.

 Professor Hawkins continued with slides regarding Euclid v. Amber U.S. Supreme Court decision approving comprehensive municipal zoning, Euclidean zoning separates land uses by type, Euclidean versus form-based Code, organizing development in communities depending how urban it is, form-based is a product of new-urbanism and regulates land use, building height and setbacks, big- and small-scale form-based codes, transect – a new urbanized concept, what form-based codes use instead of Euclidean zoning designations, natural transect, urban-to-urban transect, regulating transect, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Context Classification Guide, transect guiding principles, aerial maps of transect-based cities, rational planning model to develop solutions, do not limit scale to site, and SmartCode is the original model form-based code and is moldable to different needs and widely used throughout Florida.


 Discussion continued regarding higher density adjacent to higher development, have property boundaries, form-based code in subdivision developments throughout Florida, Orange County based their Comprehensive Plan 2025-2050 on SmartCode, emphasis that form-based code is just a tool, and what is wanted (diversity of land uses, architecture, walkable communities and getting to places without driving). BC20260408DOC006


**RECESS/RECONVENE:** 12:00 p.m. – 12:10 p.m. All Commissioners were present except Commissioners Ballard, Bearden, McCann and Rahn.

4. **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**


 A Question and Answer session was held regarding Opportunity Zones, affordable housing, economic development initiatives, how does Manatee County assure it does not become a donor community, risks Manatee County has for Tax Increment Funding, and funding strategies being implemented in other counties.

(Enter Commissioner Ballard)


 Ms. Ankudowich addressed funding for cost increases, unexpected turns, and projects in the pipeline, which may require a diversion of funding (local bonding, etc.)


 Discussion ensued on how form-based code can be implemented without being uncomfortable or overbearing, and form-based code can be used for building design i.e., historic district, downtown, and more aesthetic components.


 (Enter Commissioners Bearden and McCann by Zoom)


 Chairman Siddique spoke with State College of Florida (SCF) and CareerSource on the ability to strategically empower a workforce and upskill labor in Manatee County. There is a county role in promoting workforce development that presents an opportunity for county governments to find initiatives similar to Suncoast Prosper, to invest in the community and provide young people with the chance to attend college to get an education and return to live and work in Manatee County.


5. **SUNCOAST PROSPER INITIATIVE**


 Tommy Gregory, SCF President, spoke about SCF's internal curriculum committee and surveys that are done on challenges, what the community wants, demand on the student side, and the local job market. SCF has added a curriculum combining Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence.


 Jamie M. Smith, Associate Vice-President of Government Relations/PIO, SCF, utilized a slide presentation about the Suncoast Prosper Initiative, Suncoast Prosper is an SCF-County collaborative designed to remove financial barriers to post-secondary education and workforce training, SCF Quick Facts, SCF tuitions have not increased in 15 years, 70 percent of students are first-time in college, SCF has a 40 percent graduation rate, 50 percent of students who leave cite financial hardship as the primary reason, community references, Suncoast Prosper has demonstrated results, return on investment, and SCF generates \$507.2 million annually in regional economic impact.


 Ms. Smith spoke about a request for a minimum, three-year recurring, County investment to support a cohort of newly enrolling and continuing SCF-eligible students seeking their AA or AS degree or certificate. The request is \$1,498,150 for Year 1, \$2,996,300 for Year 2, and \$2,996,300 for Year 3.


 Commissioner Ballard stated this is a workable plan to prepare workforce readiness in Manatee County. A sustainable funding source could be Manatee County's Children's Services Dedicated Millage but would have to be presented to the Children's Services Advisory Board (CSAB) for approval for students ages 18-22 for educational purposes only. She expressed interest in placing this on the ballot for 2028.


 Commissioner Kruse stated the School Board has an equal incentive, and he expressed willingness to work with them on a community plan.

 Discussion ensued that the Board does not have to wait for a property tax referendum, Manatee County needs to refocus on where to invest tax dollars, the public wants to see the Board promote a better quality of life and see measurable outcomes of their investments, the Board can seek where to cut back in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), the CSAB Fund is healthy, and the County should include businesses.


 Ms. Smith stated SCF is being creative with public/private partnerships. Year 1 can begin in the Spring/Fall of 2027 based on funding alignment.


 Commissioner Kruse suggested SCF roll private scholarship funds into the Suncoast Prosper Initiative.

 Chairman Siddique stated he would like to review funding sources with staff.


 By Zoom, Commissioner McCann thanked SCF representatives for the presentation. BC20260408DOC007


6. **UPSKILL MANATEE**

 Joshua Matlock and Anthony Gagliano, CareerSource Suncoast, utilized a slide presentation regarding UpSkill Manatee, an economic and workforce development investment, Florida’s workforce system, and Florida Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Governance.

 James Disbro, CareerSource Suncoast, continued with slides on apprenticeship stakeholders, core components of registered apprenticeship, a wide range of industries and occupations, benefits to employers, benefits to apprentices, CareerSource Suncoast’s Sponsored Registered Apprenticeships, and highlights of Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and Pre-RAP Expansion Results.


 Discussion occurred regarding the barriers to smaller businesses administering the program, workforce development is very fragmented, Make America Skilled Again Program is looking for local leadership, U.S. is lacking getting young people apprenticed, Manatee County is looking for businesses ready for apprentices to assist with initial seed funding to get them up and running and find sponsors, and there is an initial investment.

 Mr. Matlock continued with slides regarding UpSkill Manatee’s three-phased approach, and Illustrative Per-Apprentice Investment.

 Discussion ensued regarding funding strategies, ensuring measurable outcomes, the average number of participants in the apprenticeship program, phase out the Job Creation Program and shift to this model, and have a Memorandum of Understanding with staff. BC20260408DOC008


**RECESS/RECONVENE**: 1:48 p.m. – 1:57 p.m. All Commissioners were present except Commissioners Bearden, McCann and Rahn.


7. **OPPORTUNITY ZONES**


 Aimee Johnson, Economic Development Manager, utilized a slide presentation as a follow-up to Board action (9/2/25), to review Opportunity Zones. Opportunity Zones (OZ) are federally designated census tracts that experience high levels of persistent poverty. The purpose of OZ is to attract infill development and long-term private investment for the economically distressed areas. Manatee County’s current six 2018 Zones are being sunsetted this year, and a new round of zones and rules start in 2027.

She continued with slides on the OZ designation process, purpose and objectives, background, key changes under OZ 2.0, OZ 1.0 versus OZ 2.0, 2026-2027 Designation Timeline, current OZ tracts, projected OZ 2.0 tracts, priority areas identified, geographic

focus and strategic alignment, priority areas identified, priority tracts, and OZ 2.0 designations.


 The U.S. Treasury has to release the official map of County Zones for eligible census tracts, which is the same data used by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to populate the affordable housing tables. Based on existing census data, the County can estimate what the map will look like. Staff seeks Board direction to proceed with a resolution and direction on policy and guidance.


 Chairman Siddique connected with National Association of Counties (NACO) resources, Florida Association of Counties (FAC) resources and OZ developers, and commented on pairing federal and local incentives to target development for those areas.


 Discussion ensued regarding geographic focus and strategic alignment, competing with other areas, the darker purple map in the slides is based on census data, the U.S. Treasury will examine each tract and create the final map, based on 2018 and now, all the areas from 2018 will still be eligible, Chairman Siddique does not what this in his district, State eligible designated census tracts can be designated opportunity zones, Commissioner districts in municipalities have a much more difficult time using OZ to their full advantage, two of the greatest areas of need are Samoset and Oneco, cutting the Samoset and Oneco southern block might be a smart idea and some of 14th Street, the tools are in place, the goal today is to identify the target areas, County should involve the City of Bradenton and City of Palmetto, one option would be to focus on the southwest district at the intersection of U.S. 41 and 14th Street West encompassing eight tracks, and the next steps.

 Chairman Siddique stated nothing is occurring in the Wares Creek area, in looking at the purple map OX 2.0 designations.

 Ms. Johnson stated the purple OZ 2.0 designation map with the red square is the new proposal.


 Commissioner Ballard suggested shifting the red box slightly east, making the western boundary 26th Street West, and picking up the west side of 9th Street.


 A suggestion was made to Ms. Johnson to reach out to the Cities.


 Elizabeth Cordes, Director of Business Recruitment and Expansion for the Bradenton Area Economic Development Council (EDC), commented on the City's Master Plan.

BC20260408DOC009


9. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES**

 Aimee Johnson, Economic Development Manager, utilized a slide presentation to provide an overview of Economic Development Incentives, objectives, current economic development incentives, local incentive comparison, statutory and regulatory considerations, strengths, opportunities, challenges, emerging needs, ten new incentive options, Affordable Housing Ordinance to expand Ad Valorem Tax Exemption F.S. 196.1979/Municipal Affordable Housing Property Exemption, and evolving incentive strategy.


 There was discussion on possibly cutting out incentives completely, and Board feedback is necessary.

 Ms. Johnson explained project scoping under the Current Economic Development Incentives slide. Job creation grants are very complex and better suited for smaller companies. This topic can be discussed with the Board in May. BC20260408DOC010

**CITIZEN COMMENTS**

 There were no citizen comments.

**COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

 There were no Commissioner comments.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Chairman Siddique adjourned the work session at 2:57 p.m.

Minutes Approved: June 16, 2026