

**COJ Journey Forward
Board Meeting Minutes
February 27, 2025**

1. Welcome and Opening Chairman Remarks

W.C. Gentry, Board Chair

Members Present: Betty Burney, James Ellout, W.C. Gentry, Octavius Holliday, Hilbert McDougal, Jr., LTG (ret.) Walter Piatt, Lawrence Schmitt, Dr. Tes Tuason and Stephen Zona

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Charles Griggs, Director of Community Initiatives, Rory Diamond, City Council District 13, Nick Howland, Councilman at Large – Group 3

Chairman Gentry called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and thanked everyone for their support and participation. Next, he explained that the reason for reconvening the Journey Forward is to build upon the city's low crime rate by reducing juvenile crimes overall and violent crimes in particular. He also shared that the primary goal of Journey Forward is to make recommendations to the city to promote safety.

The Journey Forward Board will collaborate with non-profit organizations to identify opportunities for increased efficiency. Then, Mr. Gentry shared the committee's recommendations from the 2023 Jacksonville Journey Forward initiative. Some of these recommendations include the importance of literacy in reducing juvenile crime and using civil citations when appropriate.

Chairman Gentry asked Councilman Rory Diamond to make a few remarks regarding his previous experience on the Jacksonville Journey Committee. Mr. Diamond spoke about the importance of collaborating with the Council and developing juvenile justice initiatives.

2. Introduction of Board Members

Each member of the Board introduced themselves and shared their background and experience relative to the Journey Forward initiative.

3. Overview of Florida Sunshine Rules Harry Wilson, Office of General Counsel

Mr. Wilson provided an overview of the Florida Sunshine Rules which require that meetings are publicly noticed, available to the public and documented via meeting minutes.

In addition, members cannot discuss business pertaining to the Journey Forward initiative outside of a publicly noticed meeting. Violation of the Sunshine Law is a criminal offense which could result in up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 civil penalty.

4. Presentation of Juvenile Justice Data and Intervention Programs Dr. Vicki Waytowich, Executive Director Partnership for Child Health

Dr. Waytowich began by reviewing a Juvenile Justice Process Map which depicted youth involvement with law enforcement including arrests and civil citations. Youth who receive civil citations (up to 3) for misdemeanors are eligible to participate in the Diversion System of Care.

Dr. Waytowich shared several 2023 Juvenile Justice dashboards including a delinquency profile, pre-arrest delinquency citations and arrest offenses. She also provided an overview of the Duval County Diversion System of Care.

5. Public Comment

Chairman Gentry asked if there were public comments. Monique Highsmith, New Life Community Church, shared her previous experience with Operation New Hope and passion for Journey Forward. She conveyed the importance of collaboration and development of youth vocational training programs.

Rebecca Davis submitted a public comment in support of Project R.E.S.T.O.R.E. which includes mentors who serve as valuable role models for youth.

Deshonna Buchanan shared her idea to create an organization to address the needs of the homeless, juveniles and disabled.

John Nooney discussed the public's access to Jacksonville's waterways, ad valorem taxes and public meetings which he recently attended.

Mr. Griggs announced that the next Journey Forward meeting will take place on March 20th at 3:00 p.m. Councilman Howland congratulated the people of Jacksonville on the reconstitution of the Journey Forward initiative and expressed his gratitude for each Board member's leadership. Chairman Gentry explained that the Board is in the process of creating Juvenile Justice and Emerging Journey subcommittees. He asked interested parties to reach out to Mr. Griggs.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Gentry at 5:07 p.m.