

FAST 2011 JOBS ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

THE PROBLEM: Recent news articles have stated that the jobs situation is improving in Pinellas; but facts show we are still in a state of crisis. The March 10th labor market report from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation states that Pinellas County has an unemployment rate of 12.1% with over 53,000 county residents currently unemployed! On a daily basis, people in our community are being laid off and are finding themselves stuck in a struggling economy with few choices. We are seeing an ever-increasing number of people seeking unemployment benefits. Their work hours are being decreased by some of the largest employers. Many people looking for jobs are finding themselves having to adjust for lower wages in positions outside of their previous industries. In many cases people are sending out dozens of resumes without getting a single interview.

RESEARCH WE HAVE DONE: Because of the seriousness of our current employment climate, the jobs committee is determined to move forward and to work on solutions that will help our struggling unemployed. Through our research, the committee has narrowed down its focus to the following three areas: helping small local businesses get more city contracts, helping local residents get access to jobs that get created from government contracts, and ensuring accessibility and effectiveness of job training programs in Pinellas County.

- We met with groups like the Small Business Development Center and the Business Assistance Center and as we began to research this problem we kept hearing about the challenges small businesses were facing in our community. With 91 percent of the county's businesses having less than 50 employees, they account for the majority of this county's employers. 80 percent of new jobs created come from small businesses. So the jobs committee began looking at ways to better help local small businesses that are struggling to compete with large corporations. The jobs committee has been tracking city contracts given to companies in St. Petersburg, Pinellas County, and the neighboring five county areas, to measure the portion that are going to small businesses.
- In conjunction with looking at small business contracts, the jobs committee has been examining local purchasing policies, starting with the city of St. Petersburg. After meeting with SBE staff and the purchasing department the committee felt that focusing on city contracts seemed to be the most cost effective and practical method to increase local access to jobs. The city of St. Petersburg gave out more than 200 million dollars in contracts last year. These contracts have the potential to create badly needed jobs for the unemployed residents of Pinellas County.
- Lastly, the jobs committee has been examining workforce readiness programs to see if they are meeting industry demands and community needs to ensure that we have an equipped and educated workforce here in Pinellas County.

THE SOLUTION:

1. Job training courses

We are concerned about the amount of support job seekers are getting and their accessibility to training relevant to currently growing industries such as the medical field. We need more affordable certificate programs that can quickly get people trained for job opportunities such as CNAs, medical techs, etc. We want Dr. Law, president of St. Petersburg College, to work to improve and expand workforce readiness programs for high demand and growing industries.

2. Increasing city contracts for small local businesses

Many of our local small businesses are at a disadvantage when bidding for city contracts. Last year at the Nehemiah Action, Mayor Foster agreed to double the amount of contracts and purchasing that goes to local small businesses. We want Mayor Foster to continue his work to keep this commitment to ensure that by the end of 2011 year contracts to small businesses have increased from 5% of the city's purchasing to 10%.

3. First source/priority hiring

Currently many subsidies and contracts given to companies have "good faith agreements" with no guarantee that jobs created as a result of these contracts go to people locally. It is not right that large corporations are receiving our local taxpayer money with no benefit to the local workforce. We are asking the city of St. Petersburg to lead the way by creating a priority hiring ordinance in order to ensure that at least 50% of jobs that get created through government subsidies and contracts go to Pinellas County residents.

JOBS ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT Continued

We would like to see an ordinance where:

- Successful bidders of city contracts are required to project the number of new job openings and replacement positions that need to be filled for the contract period and forward that information to the city. This should cover all city departments that award contracts or provide public subsidies to private entities.
- City-issued public construction contracts, city loans, grants, contracts for goods and services would all qualify under the ordinance.
- 50% of the jobs created as a result of a contract would be given to Pinellas County residents. Under such an ordinance companies with specialized jobs which could not find local residents with the skills needed would be exempt.
- The city would partner with Worknet, Goodwill or another group that can help connect employers to workers and training. Companies would then hire candidates from the pool of candidates referred by the partnering group.

In the months of February and March, the committee has met with all members of the St. Petersburg City Council to ask them to support a Priority Hiring Ordinance. We want to recognize that many of the city council members are present with us tonight to show their support for such an ordinance. We are asking Mayor Foster to show the same support for a priority hiring ordinance.

For such an ordinance to be successful, it also needs the support of the Mayor.

WHAT WE WANT SCORECARD

Mayor Bill Foster	Yes	No
Will you support the creation of a priority hiring ordinance when it comes to a vote in city council?		
Will you meet with FAST on a quarterly basis to discuss progress on the ordinance commitments?		