

MEETING MINUTES

April 2, 2026

Council Members Present: Maribeth Hepburn, Caterina Tassara, Angel Addison, Julianne Pérez, Brenda Carvalho, Christine Britt, Jeanne Lafler, Deputy Anthony Borbonio, Jessica Conway, Fred Green

Council Members Absent: Fidel Johnson, Keith Sabiel, Harold M. Paxton Jr., Cheko Carter, Carlos Mercado, Carol Weidman, Alicia Ponds

Guests: Alicia Jones (A Woman’s Place), Isabel Mouradian (Bella’s Book Bridge), Natalie (mom), Maya Goldstein (Community Tampa Bay), Camile Hebting (NAMI), Jillian Rose (City of Pinellas Park), Michelle Howard (Pinellas Public Library Cooperative), Sara Losasso (Stop the Movement), Kat Yoho (Evara Health). Cheryl Morales (Pinellas Public Library Cooperative), Kirsten Belinsky (Learning Empowered).

JWB Staff: Yaridis L. Garcia, Brianna Ray, Barbara Bennett

I. Call to Order

Julianne Pérez called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and welcomed all members and guests to the meeting.

Approval of Council Minutes – Jeanne Lafler motioned to approve the minutes, and Deputy Anthony Borbonio seconded. The Minutes were approved as submitted.

II. Open Agenda - Community Partners Updates

Evara Health representative and Mid-County Council Member Angel Addison, Student Account Manager, welcomed everyone to Evara Health. Kaylauna Navel, Associate Director of Student Services, gave a tour of Evara Health’s impressive medical academic programs and campus. Thus far, more than 86 students have graduated from Evara Health. Please visit www.Evarahealth.org for more student information.

City of Pinellas Park is offering a 45-minute Swim Safety Class beginning on April 25th, with registration for 3-12-year-olds who are not strong swimmers. This is a 4-week program and is free to families. Maximum capacity is 80 children/youth. Water safety books will also be distributed to all who enroll.

Bella's Book Bridge receives donated children's books and distributes them to multiple pediatric clinics, hospitals, and community partners in Pinellas and Hillsborough County. For more information on donating or being the recipient of books, please email: bellabookbridge@gmail.com.

Pinellas Park Police Department's Community Night was held in March. Many nonprofits, local businesses, and families participated at England Brothers. Council members reported that it was a great event again this year!

Stop the Movement – Daddy Daughter Defense class focuses on strengthening the father-daughter bond while teaching daughters vital skills for confidence and protection! The class is 1.5 hours long and offered in Largo for \$5 a person at Tampa Bay Krav Maga.

Learning Empowered hosts their annual summer camps for kids ages 3-5. They are still enrolling, and there are open spots. Please share with families. There is a \$25 registration fee, and the cost is \$175 per week. They also offer classes online for early childhood educators. Flyers were distributed with more information.

Evava shared information on Evava Health Institute and a Summer Pre-Apprentice Program for youth ages 16-19. Classes are held two days a week – lunch is provided. They are also starting dual enrollment (early admission) for students interested in going into healthcare fields.

NAMI Walk is on Sat. May 16th. This is a fundraiser that helps NAMI keep programs free for the community. The walk will be at England Brothers Park starting at 8:30 am.

Anytown celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Summer camp will continue this year at Eckerd College and is open to high school students. Students get to live on campus. There is a \$35 fee that is optional, and the cost of the week-long camp is covered through grants and fundraising. Camp will be held this year, June 8-12th.

City of Largo is hiring for summer positions working with youth and families. Open positions are posted at www.Largo.com/jobs.

The Lealman and Asian Neighborhood Family Center (LANFC) reported that their United Way Suncoast/VITA Tax collaboration continues to be in high demand. They are completely booked. Working collaboratively, almost 300 clients/families will be served this year. They're also happy to report that they applied for a grant with Leadership St. Pete and were selected to have the neighborhood family center's playground refurbished, & they will also receive educational materials for students and families.

III. Grade Level Reading & Book Bus Presentation - Brianna Ray, JWB Community Collaborations Coordinator

Mid-County Council members were updated on JWB's commitment to literacy and

grade-level reading. Early Readers Future Leaders Campaign – The vision is that all Pinellas Co. children read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade. This metric is one of the earliest and best predictors of high school graduation, college, and future success. Unfortunately, when students are not reading at grade level, they continue to fall behind as they develop, and the likelihood of future health issues and other variables like incarceration are higher.

The Book Bus is a partnership with PCS, and they go all over Pinellas County to provide free books. Each child receives 2 new books. Last year, over 5,000 kids visited the book bus - with 81 sites giving out over 11,000 books. Last year, they collaborated with the Childhood Hunger initiative, and kids left the book bus with food.

For 2026, the Book Bus will be held: July 6-July 9, July 13-16, July 20 – 23. This year, they will also be highlighting Mid-County Day with city officials and county representatives. There is a Literacy in Action Committee that focuses on community events and training and has launched literacy surveys to understand what literacy looks like in the community. They also do a lot around attendance awareness to promote attendance in school. They partner with the City of St. Pete and PCS to give Kindergarten awareness bags to incoming students. The committee also does book distributions at various locations throughout the County. They also do training for staff who work in OST, coming up on April 17th from 9 am – 12 pm. They meet quarterly, and the next Hybrid Meeting is in May on the 14th from 9 am – 10:30 am to hear updates from Pinellas County Schools and partners. Email Bray@jwbpinellas.org with any questions.

IV. Council Business

- **Prevention of Child Abuse Month – April is a special month to raise awareness around the importance of preventing child abuse in our communities and nationwide.** JWB created a garden of pinwheels in honor of the effort. Yaridis emailed out packets for members to share with families. Mid-County members wore their blue shirts to the meeting to commemorate the month, and JWB will share our Mid-County team photo as a part of their efforts to raise awareness throughout the county.
- **Grand Families - Celebrating the Heroes of Caregiving Event - Saturday, May 30th** The flyer has gone out in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. All Council members should be promoting the event. There are 38 organizations currently signed up, with only 2 spots left. There will be providers from mental health to face painting to Parent Protech and more. Please continue to spread the word.
- **Work Plan** – Yaridis will email it out for Council Members to review to ensure that we are completing the goals we established. We will need to be working on the next work plan and elections. Yaridis will be working closely with Jomar on outcome measurement. Caterina asked if the JWB Board asks that the Council work on any priorities. Yaridis communicated that strategic planning focus groups is a part of that process.
- **Mid-County Going to the Market** – Mid-County will host a resource table on May 2nd and May 23rd to share JWB resources and the Celebrating the Heroes of Caregiving event

at the Derby Lane in St. Petersburg. Please let Yaridis know if you would like to volunteer.

- **Ridgecrest Community Update** – Seasonally, there have been boys with toy guns and real guns. The Pinellas County Deputies have been working to address this situation, but there is still community concern. There has been a lot of talk about the need for increased mental health in this community. There could be some opportunities for partnership with NAMI and the JWB Mental Health initiative. If you want to get more connected in helping to support children and families being challenged with this ongoing situation, please reach out to Julianne from the City of Largo.

V. JWB Updates

The Work Plan was attached to the agenda. The Executive team will be going over the progress of the Work Plan. If anyone else would like to participate, please let Yaridis know. The executive committee will work on this over the summer. Council elections will be held in September, with those who are elected starting in October.

Every quarter there will be a survey of Community Council Members and guests. Yaridis brought the forms for everyone to complete.

JWB CEO reports will be shared every month with Council Members moving forward.

JWB is still in the process of the CEO search. On Monday, April 6th, the CEO decision is on the agenda. 3 candidates are being considered.

If anyone wants to host a meeting at their location, please let us know so that we can also get to know other partners in the mid-county region. Please let Yaridis know.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was called at 7:30 pm by Chair Julianne Pérez.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Council Secretary, Caterina Tassara

Future Meetings/Notices

- JWB Board Meeting: Monday, April 6th, 9-11:00 AM

JWB 14155 58th Street N, Clearwater, FL 33760 & YouTube

- Mid-County Council Meeting: Thursday May 7th, 6:00-7:30 PM

Public Works Building 6250 82nd Avenue N, Pinellas Park, FL 33781