

## Agenda

Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization Board of Directors

December 16, 2025

1:00 Pm

County Administration Building - Grace Knight Conference Room

12 SE 1 Street, 2nd Floor, Gainesville, FL 32601

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

- Chair Wheeler started meeting at 1pm.

### 2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

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### 3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

N/A

### 4. ROLL CALL & CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM

The following members were present at the meeting:

- Marihelen Wheeler, Alachua County Commissioner
- Harvey Ward, Mayor of Gainesville
- Ed Book, Gainesville City Commissioner
- Bryan Eastman, Gainesville City Commissioner
- Casey Willits, Gainesville City Commissioner
- Mary Alford, Alachua County Commissioner
- Anna Prizzia, Alachua County Commissioner
- Ken Cornell, Alachua County Commissioner
- James Ingle, Gainesville City Commissioner
- Adrian Hayes-Santos, Gainesville City Commissioner, attending in his role connected to the airport
- Ms. Taylor, representative from the City of Waldo

Based on the number of voting members in attendance, a quorum was present and the meeting was authorized to proceed.

The following members were not present at the meeting:

- Cynthia Chestnut, Gainesville City Commissioner

- Desmon Duncan-Walker, Gainesville City Commissioner
- Charles “Chuck” Chestnut IV, Alachua County Commissioner
- Tina Certain, Alachua County School Board representative
- University of Florida representative, listed as non-voting

## 5. AGENDA REVIEW

- Commissioner Ken Cornell moved to adjust the order of the agenda so that remaining items would be taken up after the candidate interviews.
- Commissioner Anna Prizzia seconded the motion.
- The motion passed unanimously without objection.

## 6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Commissioner Ken Cornell moved to approve the meeting minutes.
- Mayor Harvey Ward seconded the motion.
- The motion passed unanimously without objection.

## 7. ACTION ITEMS

### 7.2

#### Executive Director Interviews - Heather Akpan

The board received an overview of the Executive Director hiring process from Jim Denee, the representative from the search firm assisting with the recruitment.

- Mr. Denee explained the overall process used to identify qualified applicants, including the top criteria evaluated during screening.
- A total of nine applications were received, and candidates were reviewed based on skills, background, education, and relevant experience.
- Four candidates were initially identified as the strongest and were advanced to the subcommittee for further review.
- Two of those candidates later withdrew from consideration. A previously disqualified applicant was reevaluated, interviewed, and ultimately advanced to the subcommittee and then to the final interview stage.

#### **Screening Committee Clarification**

- Commissioner Ken Cornell asked which individuals served on the screening committee.
- Interim Executive Director Alison Moss responded that the committee consisted of Heather Akpan, Jeff Hayes, and Jesus Gomez.

#### **Candidate Status Update**

- Mr. Denee noted that an additional candidate had withdrawn, leaving two finalists.
- Commissioner Cornell asked whether the remaining candidates were Mr. Pedron or Ms. Whitfield.

- Mr. Denee confirmed that Mr. Pedron was one of the finalists.
- He stated that both remaining candidates were highly qualified for the Executive Director role.

### **Recruitment Challenges and Considerations**

- Mr. Denee explained that attracting applicants to Florida can be difficult, as the state is on the lower end of the salary range for comparable positions nationally.
- He recommended that candidates be sequestered after their interviews to allow for follow-up discussions.
- He also reviewed the strengths and qualifications that made the two finalists strong contenders for the position.

### **Board Questions**

- Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler asked additional questions regarding the candidates and the process.
- Commissioner Ken Cornell asked whether Mr. Denee believed the finalists would accept the position if offered.
- Mr. Denee responded that he had no concerns about their willingness to accept.
- Commissioner Ed Book asked about the salary range listed on the application, which showed \$140,000 to \$150,000, and whether there were discrepancies.
- Mr. Denee explained that applicants sometimes enter salary expectations before speaking with him, but he verifies the salary range in writing. Both finalists agreed to the stated salary range. He noted that negotiations may occur regarding leave benefits, but salary expectations were aligned.

### **Interview Preparation and Process Guidance**

- **Heather Akpan**, representing **Alachua County**, outlined the next steps before the Executive Director candidate interviews began. She distributed the list of thirteen standardized interview questions previously selected by the board and encouraged members to choose which questions they wished to ask.
- Ms. Akpan reminded the board of the interview guidelines, emphasizing that all general questions must be asked of both candidates to ensure fairness. Additional follow-up questions could be asked as needed, but no general question could be directed to only one candidate.
- Commissioner **Ken Cornell** asked whether the candidates had seen the questions in advance. Ms. Akpan confirmed they had not and explained that both candidates were being sequestered during the interviews. Commissioner Cornell noted that the board intended to make a decision the same day. Ms. Akpan stated that candidates would be sent back after their interviews and that **Brian** would handle any negotiation process.

### **Board Discussion on Interview Questions**

Several board members discussed the structure and content of the interview questions:

- Commissioner Adrian Hayes-Santos proposed asking a technical question regarding federal planning funds, specifically the candidates' experience

managing Transportation Planning Agency (TPA) federal funds and ensuring compliance.

- Commissioner James Ingle requested another copy of the interview packet.
- Commissioner Anna Prizzia noted that she expected both behavioral and technical questions to be included and suggested beginning the interview with an overview of each candidate's technical experience.
- Commissioner Mary Alford agreed that candidates should respond in a technical manner.
- Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler supported beginning with Commissioner Hayes-Santos's technical question.
- Commissioner Prizzia reiterated that candidates should first be allowed to introduce themselves and explain their background.
- Mayor Harvey Ward suggested asking candidates why they were interested in working in Gainesville and Alachua County. He also asked about a potential gap in one candidate's résumé. Ms. Akpan clarified that the résumé did not contain a gap, but the board was free to ask for clarification if needed.

### **Assignment of Interview Questions**

Board members selected which questions they would ask during the interviews:

- **Ms. Taylor** selected question 6.
- Commissioner **Mary Alford** selected question 10.
- Commissioner **Adrian Hayes-Santos** selected his technical question on federal planning funds.
- Commissioner **Ed Book** selected question 2 and suggested splitting Commissioner Hayes-Santos's question into two parts.
- Commissioner **Bryan Eastman** indicated he would use his own prepared question.
- Commissioner **James Ingle** selected question 3.
- Commissioner **Ken Cornell** selected question 11.
- Commissioner **Mary Alford** confirmed again that she would ask question 10.
- Commissioner **Casey Willits** proposed asking about candidates' experience working with state transportation departments.
- Commissioner **Anna Prizzia** selected question 4, focusing on areas of transportation planning.
- Mayor **Harvey Ward** indicated he would ask his own question.

### **Interview: Candidate Anoch Whitfield – Executive Director Position**

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#### **Introductions and Opening Instructions**

Interim Executive Director **Alison Moss** provided instructions for the interview process. Commissioner **Marihelen Wheeler** welcomed the candidate and explained that the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO) board is composed of both

City of Gainesville and Alachua County Commissioners, along with representatives from partner jurisdictions. Board members then introduced themselves and briefly described their professional backgrounds.

**Ms. Anoch Whitfield** introduced herself and began with an overview of her personal and professional background.

### **Candidate Background and Experience**

Ms. Whitfield shared the following:

- She is an immigrant from Vietnam and a first-generation American. She is a mother of two, with one child currently attending the University of Florida.
- She earned a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Florida State University in 2000.
- Her early career included work in Jackson County, a small three-person planning agency where staff handled all aspects of planning.
- She later worked as a planner in Tallahassee, gaining experience in a larger agency and serving as a Senior Planner in growth management.
- She worked for the Florida Department of Community Affairs under four different secretaries, gaining extensive state-level planning experience.
- She advanced to Principal Planner and worked in both Tampa and the Florida Panhandle.
- She worked with the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and later moved into the private sector with Tindale Oliver, where she worked closely with FDOT on growth management and planning projects.
- She has authored several white papers and has extensive community engagement experience across FDOT District 5, including Marion County.
- Her work included safety audits, corridor studies, public participation plans, and writing her own public involvement plan.
- She later joined Orange County as a Senior Planner.
- She noted that private-sector work created work-life balance challenges, which influenced her return to public service.

### **Discussion of Current Role**

Commissioner **Bryan Eastman** asked about her current position with the City of Ocoee. Ms. Whitfield explained that she serves as **Zoning Manager and Deputy Director**, a role she has held for five months. Because the department currently lacks both a director and a zoning manager, she is covering multiple responsibilities, including site plan review, ordinance development, and supervisory duties.

### **Leadership Style and Team Approach**

- Representative **Ms. Taylor** asked how she adapts her leadership style.
- Ms. Whitfield described herself as goal-oriented and highly committed to completing projects. She emphasized teamwork, communication, and ensuring staff have the information they need to succeed. She noted that she often works beyond 40 hours when necessary to meet deadlines and believes in building a supportive, informed team.

### **Regional Collaboration and MTPO Role**

- Commissioner **Bryan Eastman** asked how she envisions the MTPO working with partner communities.
- Ms. Whitfield described herself as a “dirt planner,” emphasizing that land use and transportation decisions directly affect people’s lives. She believes the MTPO should help the region identify shared values, understand growth patterns, and address safety and mobility needs. She referenced concepts such as the “15-minute city” and noted that congestion and level-of-service metrics must be understood in context.

### **Experience With Federal Transportation Funds**

- Commissioner **Adrian Hayes-Santos** asked about her hands-on experience managing federal planning funds.
- Ms. Whitfield explained that while she has not personally served in a decision-making role for federal transportation funding, she has supported MTPOs through her work at Tindale Oliver, including assisting Volusia and Brevard counties with long-range plans and capital improvement programming. She stated she is a quick learner and has been reviewing federal regulations, including the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), in preparation for the interview.

### **Managing Change**

- Commissioner **James Ingle** asked how she has helped communities navigate change.
- Ms. Whitfield said that people often fear change, but clear information and engagement can shift perspectives. She described a subdivision project in Orange County where initial opposition eventually turned into support once residents understood the benefits and impacts.

### **Adaptability**

- Commissioner **Ken Cornell** asked about a time she had to adapt to multiple changes.
- Ms. Whitfield described working in Oviedo, where a development review manager was terminated shortly after she arrived. As a new employee, she had to assume both her own responsibilities and those of the vacant position while also serving as acting director during her supervisor’s absence.

### **Project Management and Meeting Deadlines**

- Commissioner **Mary Alford** asked about her approach to managing large projects and deadlines.
- Ms. Whitfield said she begins with the end goal and works backward from published deadlines. She conducts kickoff meetings, assigns clear points of contact, identifies required skills, and builds schedules that account for staff capacity and personal obligations. She emphasized respect for work-life balance and team cohesion.

### **Experience With State Transportation Departments**

- Commissioner **Casey Willits** asked about her experience with state transportation agencies.
- Ms. Whitfield said she has worked with FDOT Districts 1, 2, and 5 and is familiar with the department’s work program, contract management, and project management processes.

### **Strategic Direction and Organizational Change**

- Commissioner **Anna Prizzia** asked for an example of adjusting organizational goals.
- Ms. Whitfield described leading a major update to the City of Ocoee's outdated 2002 vision plan. With limited room for outward growth, the city needed a new vision and a condensed comprehensive plan to guide redevelopment and internal growth.

### **Partnership Development**

- Commissioner **Ed Book** asked about managing difficult partnerships.
- Ms. Whitfield emphasized accountability, saying she was raised to believe that "your word matters." She expects staff and partners to follow through and supports her team in meeting expectations. She noted that lack of follow-through reflects poorly on the organization.

### **Interest in Gainesville and Alachua County**

- Mayor **Harvey Ward** asked why she is interested in the position.
- Ms. Whitfield said Executive Director opportunities are rare, and she values ethics and accountability. With a child attending UF, she has a personal connection to the community. She shared that her daughter has been involved in two bicycle crashes locally, and she hopes to contribute to improving safety and mobility.

### **Career Path and Motivation**

- Commissioner **Marihelen Wheeler** asked how she transitioned from an arts degree to planning.
- Ms. Whitfield said she initially pursued art but sought a more stable career that still allowed creativity. She discovered planning and was drawn to its potential to influence policy and improve communities. As an immigrant, she wants to advocate for others facing barriers.

### **Community Engagement**

- Representative **Ms. Taylor** asked about her experience conducting workshops.
- Ms. Whitfield described a rural visioning project in Jackson County where distrust among rural mayors was high. She met with them individually to build trust and encourage participation.

### **Candidate Questions to the Board**

Ms. Whitfield asked several questions:

#### **Where is the MTPO housed?**

- Commissioner **Anna Prizzia** explained that the MTPO is an independent organization, with HR and payroll support provided by the county.
- Interim Director **Alison Moss** added that office space is currently provided through an agreement with the county, with future space to be determined by the new Executive Director.
- Commissioner **Ed Book** noted that the Executive Director will be responsible for hiring staff.

#### **Timeline for Starting**

- Commissioner **Wheeler** and Commissioner **Eastman** expressed a desire for the new director to begin as soon as possible.

- Ms. Whitfield said she would need time to transition from her current role and suggested **January 12** as a possible start date.

### **Restructuring and Position Descriptions**

- Ms. Whitfield asked about the status of staff position descriptions.
- Ms. Moss said two draft descriptions exist but have not been published. The new Executive Director will have input on recruitment and organizational structure.
- Mayor **Ward** emphasized that the MTPO is entering a new phase and needs a leader ready to take charge.
- Ms. Whitfield closed by expressing her passion for planning and mobility, noting that lack of mobility for seniors is a significant concern.

## **End of Interview**

### **Interview: Candidate Michael Pedron – Executive Director Position**

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#### **Introductions and Opening Instructions**

- Interim Executive Director **Alison Moss** provided instructions for the interview process.  
Commissioner **Marihelen Wheeler** welcomed **Mr. Michael Pedron**, explaining that the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO) board is composed of City of Gainesville and Alachua County Commissioners, along with representatives from partner jurisdictions. Board members introduced themselves and shared brief professional backgrounds.
- Mr. Pedron then introduced himself.

#### **Candidate Background and Experience**

Mr. Pedron provided an overview of his professional background and qualifications, including initiating a bike-related co-op/non-profit, graduate school experience, internship, and professional roles of increased responsibility with the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT). He described his present roles and responsibilities as an Assistant Director with the NYCDOT.

#### **Leadership Style and Flexibility**

- Representative Taylor asked Mr. Pedron about his flexibility in challenging situations.
- Mr. Michael Pedron explained that he approaches difficult circumstances with adaptability, working with the resources available and meeting collaborators on their terms. He noted that in project implementation—especially when strong constituencies oppose a project—he relies on listening, dialogue, and incorporating community feedback to find common ground.

#### **Community Workshops and Early Program Experience**

- Representative Taylor asked about his experience running workshops, specifically related to a bicycle program.

- Mr. Pedron described his involvement in an “earn-a-bike” program while working as a bicycle mechanic during school. Participants repaired bicycles in exchange for receiving one. He said he leveraged a wide network of existing community partners to support the program.

### **Current Role in New York City**

Commissioner **Bryan Eastman** asked about his current position.

Mr. Pedron explained that he serves as the **Assistant Director in the Cycling and Mobility Planning Group** within a large, hierarchical New York City agency. His responsibilities include:

- Managing the inventory and database of existing bicycle infrastructure
- Tracking hundreds of active projects from design through construction to ensure integration with the bicycle network
- Managing a portfolio of capital projects, including major street reconstruction efforts
- Overseeing external project review for all right-of-way impacts, including state, sewer, and parks projects

He noted that the capital program he manages involves approximately **\$1 billion** in funding, acknowledging that New York’s scale is unique but expressing pride in the work.

### **Role of the MTPO in the Region**

- Commissioner Eastman asked how the MTPO should interact with surrounding communities.
- Mr. Pedron said the MTPO must be **highly interactive**, building credibility and trust with the public. He emphasized that without community trust, the MTPO cannot effectively advance its regional program.

### **Experience With Federal Transportation Funds**

Commissioner **Adrian Hayes-Santos** asked about his experience managing federal funds and multimodal capital projects.

Mr. Pedron described extensive involvement with federal funding programs:

- His agency has a dedicated grant management unit and pursues every available grant.
- Early in his career, he worked on a **TIGER grant**, which helped launch several capital programs.
- He has worked with **FHWA** and **FTA** grants, including funding for bus stop benches.
- He managed recurring **CMAQ** (air quality) funding that supported bicycle programs, including writing the annual design approval documents addressing federal compliance.
- He worked on a **RAISE grant** totaling more than **\$7 million**, which expanded the agency’s planning capacity, including development of a custom demand model to analyze mode share.
- He supported corridor planning programs involving workshops and prioritization of projects for future budgets.

Mr. Pedron explained that capital project prioritization is guided by agency goals and the Mayor's Office. He contrasted quick-build operational projects—which require constant upkeep—with capital projects that create lasting, transformative change. He emphasized:

- Prioritizing infrastructure changes over simple cost-benefit analysis
- Elevating projects in historically under-invested areas to improve equity
- Evaluating projects based on network-wide impacts, not just isolated metrics
- Understanding risk (e.g., a single pedestrian injury in a low-volume area may indicate high danger)
- Supporting mode shift by expanding mobility options

### **Managing Transformational Change**

Commissioner **James Ingle** asked about navigating change with communities. Mr. Pedron said people often feel threatened by change, especially regarding streets they use daily. He noted:

- Many residents feel entitled to parking or existing roadway configurations.
- Changes such as reallocating parking or turn lanes for bike lanes create trade-offs and initial disruption.
- His team acknowledges concerns, monitors impacts, and adjusts designs rather than dismissing feedback.
- Temporary materials (e.g., cones, delineators) allow for testing and refinement before permanent capital installation.
- Some communities fear change due to concerns about gentrification or displacement.
- The meaning of a project—such as a bike lane—can differ dramatically depending on the community's lived experience.

### **Adaptability and Responding to Rapid Change**

Commissioner **Ken Cornell** asked about adaptability and referenced Mr. Pedron's mention of "The Kickstand" in his application.

Mr. Pedron described the rapid succession of changes during **COVID-19**, including shifts in commuting, outdoor activity, and workplace patterns, combined with a new mayoral administration and internal agency changes. He explained:

- Not every major change requires an immediate or proportional reaction.
- His team implemented temporary projects to test ideas and later removed or modified them based on performance.
- Some temporary changes revealed long-term needs and became permanent.
- The surge in recreational cycling during the pandemic created opportunities to shift travel patterns and rethink commuting behavior.

### **Project Management and Delivering Large Projects on Time**

Commissioner **Mary Alford** asked how Mr. Pedron would manage large projects in a smaller organization with fewer support resources than his current agency.

Mr. **Pedron** explained that he relies on structured project management tools, including:

- Developing **Gantt charts** with clear deadlines and deliverables
- Conducting regular staff check-ins to ensure nothing is missed
- Using visual planning to identify parallel tasks and critical paths
- Anticipating potential disruptions early and adapting proactively

He emphasized that staying ahead of risks is essential to delivering projects on time.

### **Experience Working With State Departments of Transportation**

Commissioner **Casey Willits** asked about his experience working with Departments of Transportation.

Mr. Pedron said his experience is primarily with **New York State**, where:

- The state owns much of the transportation infrastructure
- His agency works closely with state partners on **grant compliance, FTA requirements, and highway oversight**
- His team coordinates with the state from **project scoping through conceptual design**
- His agency often leads **community engagement** for state-led projects
- They provide engineering review comments and collaborate on **work zone safety** to ensure residents can safely use streets during construction

He noted that while the context differs, the collaborative and compliance-focused nature of the work is directly transferable.

### **Strategic Planning and Organizational Vision**

Commissioner **Anna Prizzia** asked about his experience with strategic planning, especially in a newly forming organization.

Mr. Pedron described a major strategic planning effort at New York City DOT during a mayoral transition:

- The agency conducted a **survey-based prioritization exercise** across senior staff and all levels below
- They developed a **weighted scoring system** to rank projects against strategic goals
- This system ensured project prioritization was **defensible**, transparent, and insulated from political shifts
- The agency is now refreshing the process under a new administration with different priorities
- He emphasized the importance of aligning strategic goals with **funding opportunities**, including leveraging federal grants and matching funds

He noted that strategic thinking must be both **vision-driven** and **funding-aware**.

### **Interagency Partnerships and Conflict Resolution**

Commissioner **Ed Book** asked about navigating difficult partnerships.

Mr. Pedron described extensive experience working with:

- Capital construction agencies

- The city's Economic Development Corporation
- The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

He explained that agencies often have different priorities, but collaboration improves when staff work directly together on technical details. He shared an example:

- DEP's "cloudburst" program involved major sewer and roadway reconstruction
- His team pushed to make a temporary bike lane permanent during the project
- After months of coordination, they discovered utility conflicts and insufficient funding to relocate utilities
- Although the full improvement was not possible, they negotiated **partial upgrades** that still improved safety and mobility

He emphasized that even when compromises are necessary, measurable improvements can still be achieved.

### **Interest in Gainesville and Alachua County**

Mayor **Harvey Ward** asked why he is interested in the position.

Mr. Pedron said he has deep personal roots in the area and values the community. He described Alachua County as "where nature meets culture" and expressed admiration for:

- The region's commitment to preserving natural resources
- Transformative projects such as **South Main Street** and **Depot Park**
- The thoughtful approach to infrastructure improvements, including minimizing utility disruptions

He said his personal connections and professional passion for mobility make this role especially meaningful.

### **Career Path and Relocation**

Commissioner **Marihelen Wheeler** asked how a "Florida kid" ended up in New York.

Mr. Pedron said he values personal relationships, and when close friends moved to New York, he followed the opportunity.

### **Candidate Questions to the Board**

Mr. Pedron asked several questions about the MTPO's **Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**, specifically:

- Which **aspirational projects** in the LRTP are most underappreciated
- Whether there is board consensus on priorities

Board members responded:

- Commissioner **Hayes-Santos** highlighted safety and multimodal needs around UF and 13th Street
- Commissioner **Wheeler** noted heavy commuter traffic entering the county
- Commissioner **Prizzia** emphasized regional connectivity, especially between the city center and rural areas
- Commissioner **Cornell** noted the MTPO's recent transition from the City to the County
- Commissioner **Wheeler** referenced upcoming plans to four-lane Archer Road
- Commissioner **Alford** mentioned complete streets needs around the university area

## **Board Expectations for Short- and Long-Term Success**

Mr. Pedron asked what success looks like for the MTPO in the near term and over several years.

Board members responded:

- Commissioner **Willits** noted the board had discussed this previously
- Commissioner **Cornell** said success includes **standing up the organization, staffing it, and transitioning control from the state**
- Commissioner **Eastman** emphasized improving relationships with state and local partners
- Mr. Pedron acknowledged that the Executive Director will initially rely heavily on county support
- Commissioner **Hayes-Santos** clarified that the MTPO is an **independent agency**, though it currently contracts with the county for administrative services
- Mayor **Ward** said success includes establishing the organization, identifying long-term needs, and ensuring accountability and transparency
- Commissioner **Book** emphasized community engagement and understanding public priorities
- Interim Director **Alison Moss** added that FDOT is supportive and she would remain available in an assisting role for approximately six months

## **Timeline and Availability**

Mr. Pedron asked about the expected start date.

Commissioner **Cornell** said the board ideally wanted someone to start “last week,” but they are flexible.

Commissioner **Willits** said a mid-January start is likely, and the board hopes to make a decision before the holidays.

## **Commissioner Casey Willits – “How many people have you managed?”**

Candidate: Anoch (First Candidate)

- Reported managing teams of varying sizes throughout her career.
- Has supervised groups of 3, 2, 8, and is currently managing 14 employees.

Candidate: Michael Pedron (Second Candidate)

- Began supervising junior staff in 2019.
- Since then, has managed 6–7 project managers at any given time, along with additional GIS and junior staff.
- Noted that some staff were direct reports, while others were shared-supervision roles, particularly within capital project management teams.

## **Discussion**

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### **Mayor Harvey Ward**

Mayor Ward said he reviewed both candidates' materials and noted a significant difference in the number of transportation-specific references: approximately **16** in Ms. Whitfield's materials versus **40** in Mr. Pedron's. He emphasized that the MTPO is hiring a **transportation planner**, and while he believes Ms. Whitfield is strong, he views Mr. Pedron as the more transportation-focused candidate.

### **Commissioner Adrian Hayes-Santos**

Commissioner Hayes-Santos said Ms. Whitfield is an excellent communicator but her background leans heavily toward **land use and zoning**, not transportation planning. He felt Mr. Pedron's answers reflected direct experience with **large transportation projects**, whereas hers did not.

### **Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler**

Commissioner Wheeler said, "It's the bike stuff," indicating that Mr. Pedron's extensive bicycle and mobility planning experience stood out to her.

### **Commissioner Mary Alford**

Commissioner Alford disagreed with prioritizing technical expertise first. She emphasized cultural fit, saying that strong technical skills can be learned but cultural alignment cannot. She said she had "so many hell yeses" for Ms. Whitfield and fewer for Mr. Pedron. She also valued Ms. Whitfield's familiarity with the Florida planning system.

### **Commissioner Casey Willits**

Commissioner Willits noted that Mr. Pedron frequently used "we" in his responses, while Ms. Whitfield used more "I" statements. He said Ms. Whitfield does have some transportation experience, and some board members value her zoning and development background. He questioned whether Mr. Pedron has the same level of **rural experience**. He said he was "on the fence," and noted that Mr. Pedron's involvement with **NACTO** is a positive.

### **Commissioner Anna Prizzia**

Commissioner Prizzia also focused on the "we" versus "I" distinction. She found the interview format unusual and felt that some of Mr. Pedron's "we" statements sounded like accomplishments of his department rather than his own. She acknowledged his experience with complex political environments but said the MTPO is hiring a **manager**, not a principal planner. She felt Ms. Whitfield's background and personal story aligned more closely with the leadership role.

### **Commissioner Ed Book**

Commissioner Book said the decision was "tight." He viewed Ms. Whitfield as having stronger **managerial skills**, while Mr. Pedron had stronger **technical MTPO-specific expertise**. He believed Ms. Whitfield could get the organization up and running more quickly, but noted she was "very opinionated" about past colleagues. He said Mr.

Pedron may lack some management experience but is highly capable. He concluded that both candidates are hireable and even wondered aloud whether both could be brought on in some capacity.

### **Mayor Harvey Ward (second comment)**

Mayor Ward added that the MTPO must serve both city and county needs. He noted that Orange County is a large organization, while Ocoee and Oviedo are smaller, and he felt Mr. Pedron had demonstrated the ability to operate across different scales. He said both candidates present risks but both can do the job. He leaned toward Mr. Pedron as the more transportation-focused candidate.

### **Representative Taylor**

Representative Taylor said she liked both candidates but believed Ms. Whitfield was the better fit. She valued Ms. Whitfield's Florida experience, rural engagement background, Tallahassee connections, and multilingual abilities. She felt Ms. Whitfield had sufficient management experience and stood out in her approach to rural communities.

### **Commissioner Bryan Eastman**

Commissioner Eastman said both candidates were strong. He noted that Ms. Whitfield had more time to prepare for the interview, while Mr. Pedron had only a day. He was impressed by Mr. Pedron's advancement within a highly complex agency like NYC DOT. He believed Mr. Pedron must have extensive community planning experience. For the MTPO's needs—finding low-cost wins and navigating FDOT—he felt Mr. Pedron had relevant problem-solving experience. He remained undecided.

### **Commissioner Hayes-Santos (second comment)**

Commissioner Hayes-Santos clarified that Ms. Whitfield's resume lists **limited proficiency** in additional languages. He appreciated Mr. Pedron's philosophy of improving partner relationships "at least 10%," which aligns with the MTPO's need for incremental progress.

### **Commissioner James Ingle**

Commissioner Ingle said he had concerns about Ms. Whitfield's frequent job changes and whether she would stay long-term. He also noted her comments about working excessive hours, though she later moderated that statement. He felt she is not the transportation planner the MTPO needs, but she **is** the type of leader who can stand up a new organization and hire technical staff. He valued her Florida contacts and agency experience. He leaned toward Ms. Whitfield.

### **Commissioner Ken Cornell**

Commissioner Cornell said he admired Mr. Pedron and believed he wants to return to the area for the right reasons. He praised Mr. Pedron's cutting-edge transportation planning experience. However, he also praised Ms. Whitfield's decade of experience in Orange County, her work with both small and large jurisdictions, and her DOT background. He said she would be doing the work while standing up the organization and that her life experience was "unbelievable." He said when a candidate gives many

“hell yeses,” that is meaningful. He believed Ms. Whitfield would want to build a legacy and concluded, “I think we win with Ms. Whitfield.”

### **Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler (closing comment)**

Commissioner Wheeler said she heard the “I versus we” distinction and valued the number of hours Ms. Whitfield has put into projects. She believed Ms. Whitfield has strong transportation-related experience and valuable Florida contacts. She also appreciated Mr. Pedron’s local roots and success in New York, but emphasized the need for someone willing to “stay up late” to get the organization established.

### **Request for References and Staff Input**

- Several board members asked whether references or recommendations were available.
- **Commissioner Anna Prizzia**
- Commissioner Prizzia asked for input from **Interim Executive Director Alison Moss**.
- **Interim Executive Director Alison Moss**
  - Ms. Moss stated she had a **conflict of interest**, but offered general observations:
  - Mr. Pedron is clearly a **transportation planner**.
  - Ms. Whitfield has **lighter transportation experience**.
  - The Executive Director must understand the **nuances** of the role and navigate them “gracefully,” which she described as “quite a dance.”

### **Expectations for Responsiveness and Independence**

- **Commissioner Marihelen Wheeler**
- Commissioner Wheeler emphasized the need for someone who is **responsive to all jurisdictions but not beholden to any**.
- **Commissioner Bryan Eastman**
- Commissioner Eastman noted that the MTPO must be prepared to **fight for transportation priorities**.

### **Commissioner Wheeler (second comment)**

She added that the Executive Director must be able to **push back** on the board when necessary.

### **Additional Board Member Reflections**

- **Representative Taylor**
- Taylor said Ms. Whitfield demonstrated an ability to **bring people together** when problems arise. She also highlighted Ms. Whitfield’s experience in **rural counties**, such as Jackson County.
- **Commissioner Ed Book**
- Commissioner Book asked what day-to-day staff thought of the candidates.
- **Moss**

- Ms. Moss responded that **big-city experience is tough**, and success requires being “scrappy” to get things done.
- Commissioner Book said succession planning and the ability to stand up the organization were important to him. He preferred Ms. Whitfield but wished there were a way to retain both candidates.

### **Moss (second comment)**

- She noted that the MTPO will have **two key positions**:
  - Transportation Planning
  - Director of Multimodal Planning
- She suggested both roles could be considered in the future.

### **Political and Organizational Context**

- **Commissioner Mary Alford**
- Commissioner Alford said political environments in Florida are challenging, and Ms. Whitfield has worked in Orlando jurisdictions with **very different political cultures**. She felt both candidates were tough, but Ms. Whitfield was “the right one for right now.”
- **Commissioner Hayes-Santos**
- He reiterated that the MTPO needs someone who can **both manage and perform transportation planning**, because the organization lacks capacity for a manager-only role. He emphasized that **every one of Mr. Pedron’s answers** was rooted in transportation planning.
- **Commissioner Prizzia**
- She noted that the field has a lot of technical “lingo,” and both candidates handled it differently.

### **Concerns About Candidate Pool and Salary Range**

- **Mayor Harvey Ward**
- Mayor Ward said neither candidate was perfect and expressed frustration that the MTPO only received **two finalists**, attributing it to a **lower salary range**. He believed a higher salary would have attracted more candidates.
- **Commissioner Prizzia**
- She reminded the board that the subcommittee had agreed to keep the salary **mid-range**.
- **Moss**
- Ms. Moss clarified that the search firm recommended offering the **top of the range**, and only one candidate declined due to salary.
- **Mayor Ward (second comment)**
- He maintained that a **broader salary range** would have produced a larger candidate pool.

### **Further Candidate Comparisons**

- **Commissioner Prizzia**
- She acknowledged the strong arguments for transportation expertise but raised concerns about Ms. Whitfield’s **frequent job changes**. She noted that Mr.

Pedron appears to be **steadily advancing** in his career. She also expressed concern about Ms. Whitfield's comments about working excessive hours. She summarized:

- If the priority is **standing up the agency quickly**, Ms. Whitfield is the better fit.
- If the priority is **creative, out-of-the-box transportation planning**, Mr. Pedron may be stronger.

She admitted that Moss's comments made her "wishy-washy" about her earlier preference for Ms. Whitfield.

### Screening Committee Input

- **Jesus Gomez (Screening Committee Member)**
- Mr. Gomez said neither finalist was in his **top two**. He described the interviews as "courteous."

He said:

- Mr. Pedron is a **good transportation planner**, but **not yet a manager**.
- He would do well, but it might take time.

### Additional Board Member Comments

- **Commissioner Ken Cornell**
- Commissioner Cornell said he initially worried about Ms. Whitfield's comment about working 60 hours, but her later comments about **family balance** reassured him.

He emphasized:

- The MTPO relies heavily on **FDOT**, and the Executive Director must communicate effectively with state and federal partners.
- He believes Ms. Whitfield would hire the necessary technical expertise.
- He did not like Mr. Pedron's answer about what the MTPO needs in six months.

He concluded that **Ms. Whitfield is the right person at the right time**.

○

### Commissioner James Ingle

Commissioner Ingle ranked **Whitfield first, Cornell second** (referring to the ranking system used earlier).

### Commissioner Casey Willits

Commissioner Willits said:

- In the **first year**, Ms. Whitfield would be stronger.
- In **five years**, he believed Mr. Pedron might deliver higher-quality projects.

He said constituents care about **quality**, and Mr. Pedron seems more aligned with that.

He worried about whether the MTPO could be fully established within five years.

He believed Mr. Pedron would have performed better with more preparation time.

He leaned toward **Mr. Pedron**.

### Mayor Ward (third comment)

Mayor Ward noted that Mr. Pedron was familiar with **local projects**, which he felt mattered.

### **Commissioner Hayes-Santos**

Commissioner Hayes-Santos made a **substitute motion**, supported by Mayor Ward.

### **Commissioner Wheeler**

Commissioner Wheeler said that frequent job changes are not necessarily negative; some boards and jurisdictions are difficult to work with, and moving on can be reasonable.

### **Public Comment**

#### **Community Member: Khaled Limme**

Mr. Limme, who worked briefly in planning and helped establish the MTPO, offered public comment:

- Transportation planning in Gainesville/Alachua County is **nothing like New York**, given the mix of urban and rural communities.
- He felt Mr. Pedron did not reveal much of his **personal side**.
- He praised Ms. Whitfield's **extemporaneous presentation**, personal story, and people skills.
- He noted that **Orange County hired her back**, which he viewed as a strong endorsement.
- He believed she would be proactive in outreach and relationship-building.

### **Final Vote on Candidate Selection**

- The **original motion to hire Ms. Whitfield** as the MTPO Executive Director **passed**.
- Commissioners **Cornell** and **Alford** stated that if negotiations with Ms. Whitfield fail, the board should move to **hire Mr. Pedron** as the second choice.

### **Negotiation Process**

- The board discussed who should lead contract negotiations.
- **Brian** Eastman was identified as the negotiator, with **unanimous agreement** to use the **hiring firm as a resource** during negotiations.
- **Heather** confirmed that negotiations would proceed with the primary candidate and noted that Ms. Whitfield may already be aware of the board's decision.

### **Authority to Hire Staff**

- Commissioner **Alford** emphasized that the new Executive Director should have the authority to **hire their own team**.

## **7.1 Election of Officers**

Election of Officers to serve the following positions for the MTPO Board for the 2026 calendar year:

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Representative for Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council (MPOAC)
- Alternative representative for the Florida MPOAC
  - MPOAC Calendar:
    - Wednesday, 1/28
    - Thursday, 4/30
    - Thursday, 7/30
    - Thursday, 10/29\* (October date subject to change to provide Board flexibility to join a partner event/conference)

### **MTPO Leadership Structure**

#### **Chair and Vice Chair**

- Commissioner **Cornell** proposed that:
  - **Casey Willits** serve as **Chair**
  - **Mary Alford** serve as **Vice Chair**
  - The **MP OAC representative** should be from the county
- There was discussion about whether the **Mayor** could serve in that role; Moss clarified there is **no Treasurer** position.

#### **Amended Motion**

- Commissioner **Cornell** amended the motion regarding leadership roles.
- Commissioner **Prizzia** seconded.
- The motion **passed unanimously**.

#### **Meeting Schedule and Terms**

- **Moss** noted that the MTPO Board meets **quarterly**, and the leadership terms are for **three years**.
- Commissioner **Wheeler** asked whether the board was still following that schedule; Moss confirmed the dates were already established.

#### **MP OAC Representation**

- Commissioner **Cornell** proposed:
  - **Mary Alford** as the **MPOAC representative**
  - **Commissioner Ingle** as the **alternate**
- Commissioner **Prizzia** seconded.
- The motion passed.
- Commissioner **Eastman** noted that having those connections at the state level would be beneficial.

#### **Scheduling Conflicts**

- Commissioner **Ingle** reviewed the proposed meeting times and noted that the **4:30 PM and 7:30 PM** meetings do **not conflict** with City Commission meetings.

## **8. AGENCY REPORTS / PARTNER UPDATES**

- Florida Department of Transportation
- Alachua County School Board
- Gainesville-Alachua County Regional Airport
- University of Florida

## **9. UPCOMING MEETINGS OF INTEREST**

Upcoming TAC/CAC Meetings – December 17, 2pm and 6pm, respectively

Next Board Meeting – January 5, 3pm

Interim Executive Director Alison Moss informed the board that:

- A TAC/CAC joint meeting will be held to review performance measures and the Transportation Alternatives (TA) application.
  - These items will be brought to the MTPO Board at the January 5th meeting.

## **10. DIRECTOR COMMENTS**

### **Outstanding Financial Issues With the Regional Planning Council (RPC)**

Interim Executive Director Alison Moss reported ongoing financial issues with the North Central Regional Planning Council (NCRPC):

- The MTPO is still waiting for full financial documentation from the RPC.
- The RPC has recently become more cooperative, but documentation remains incomplete.
- Moss requested authorization from the Board to pursue legal action if the RPC does not comply.

Motion:

- Brian moved to authorize legal action if necessary.
- Commissioner Ingle seconded.
- Motion passed.

Board Questions

- Commissioner Wheeler asked, “How much?”
- Moss responded: “We don’t know.”

Acknowledgments

- Brian thanked the Clerk’s Finance Department, noting the complexity of the request.

### **Staffing and Financial Oversight**

Commissioner Cornell

- Asked whether the county is paying for another FTE to support financial oversight.

Commissioner Hutchinson

- Noted that the Clerk's Office has spotless audits and should continue supporting the MTPO.
- Emphasized the need for accurate financial understanding.

Brian

- Said having Todd involved ensures a strong finance team.

Commissioner Cornell (second comment)

- Noted the Clerk's Office supports many organizations and the county has funded an additional FTE to help.

Commissioners Book and Alford

- Both attend RPC meetings.

### **Advocacy and Communication With the RPC**

Commissioner Willits

- Asked whether the MTPO needs advocacy from the RPC and whether it is worthwhile.

Moss

- Will attend the January 22 RPC meeting.

Commissioner Alford

- Asked whether the Board should authorize a chair's letter.

Commissioner Willits

- Suggested sending information directly to each RPC member, noting that when he previously served on the RPC, questions about MTPO funding were met with "crickets."
- He emphasized that not all RPC members are receiving accurate information.

Commissioner Cornell

- Said if the RPC does not provide documentation by the 3rd, further action is needed.

Commissioner Hayes-Santos

- Recommended conducting an audit if the RPC cannot provide documentation.

Commissioner Alford

- Noted the RPC has known about this issue for a year.

Brian

- Said the MTPO only learned of the issue because FDOT flagged it.
- Suggested the MTPO could involve an outside entity if needed.

## Motion

- Brian moved to send a chair's letter to the RPC requesting full financial information and a complete accounting of cash funds.
- Alford seconded.
- Motion passed unanimously.

## Roadway Concerns Raised by Board Members

### Commissioner Prizzia

#### Reported constituent concerns about:

- County Road 235A near US-441, where trucks from a distribution center are damaging the roadway.
- Trucks should be using CR 235 to US-441, not the smaller county road.
- Suggested the distribution center may need to update routing systems and coordinate with Ramon.

### Representative Taylor

#### Reported similar issues in Waldo:

- Trucks turning unnecessarily near the post office on US-301, knocking down stop signs and damaging asphalt.
- Traffic lights near City Hall are functioning but trucks continue to cut through.

### Levy County

- Reported similar truck-related damage between Archer and Bronson.

### Representative Taylor (additional concerns)

- CR 218: Road grading leaves ruts that damage vehicles; a resident emailed concerns.
- Brooker: Road deterioration affecting trucks.
- Micanopy: The right-hand lane on US-441 is in poor condition.

### Moss

- Asked members to send all road concerns directly to her.

## Rural Representation and Board Transitions

### Commissioner Cornell

- Asked when the rural representative rotates.
- Moss confirmed the term is two years.

### Leadership for Next Meeting

- Casey Willits will chair the next MTPO meeting.
- Commissioner Cornell thanked Commissioner Wheeler for her service.

- Casey thanked the board for their feedback and for setting a high standard for cycling initiatives in smaller cities.

Commissioner Wheeler

- Thanked the board and acknowledged the work done to fix a sidewalk for a blind resident.

**11. MEMBER COMMENTS**

**12. PUBLIC COMMENTS (GENERAL)**

**13. ADJOURNMENT**

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