

Brief: 8 Takeaways from Last Week's Economic Equity Policy Dialogue with Newly-Elected Mayor Ken Welch

✦ Transcript of Q&A with Panelists & Participants



Introduction

As we conclude our annual MLK Day festivities, it's a fitting time to recall the title and theme of Dr. Martin Luther King's penultimate book before his assassination in 1968. The book was titled "Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?"

In it, Dr. King emphasized many of the same themes as St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch did last week, during a 1.5-hour Economic Equity Policy Dialogue with 125 diverse equity practitioners (held January 11, 2022).

Welch is the first mayor of St. Pete to stake a "day one" priority on equity in development and business opportunity. He spoke at length about what that means during the Zoom gathering of 140 diverse practitioners and entrepreneurs.

"Straight, no chaser," was the tone of the mayor's remarks. In characteristically measured voice, Mayor Welch set a standard for

intentionality and collaboration in achieving his historic commitment to "equity in all."

Panelists and participants served up nearly 20 questions, probing Welch's plans for aggressive actions on the housing crisis, sustainability, workforce development, zoning, the multi-billion-dollar Tropicana Field project, and more.

Part 1 of this brief captures eight takeaways from the dialogue, about Welch's management style, his definition of economic equity, and planned first steps as he begins his first term as St. Petersburg's mayor.

Part 2 is a transcript of the mayor's Q&A with six panelists.

Part 3 is a transcript of the mayor's Q&A with participants.

View the Dialogue

[Click here](#) to view the video for the Economic Equity Policy Dialogue

Co-Sponsors & Participants

The January 2022 Economic Equity Policy Dialogue was convened by The Equity Institute of St. Petersburg (by The 2020 Plan, Inc.), St. Petersburg Branch NAACP, Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, and the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

Co-Sponsors

- The 2020 Plan/One Community
- The Downtown Partnership
- Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg
- Grow Smarter
- Mt. Zion Progressive MB Church
- People Empowering & Restoring Communities,
- Pinellas County Economic Development
- Pinellas County Urban League
- Pinellas Opportunity Council
- St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce
- St. Petersburg Branch NAACP,
- St. Petersburg College
- St. Petersburg Innovation Center
- St. Petersburg / Pinellas Higher Education for Race Equity (SPHERE) Consortium
- Tampa Bay Black Business Investment Corp.
- University of South Florida - St. Petersburg

Panelists

- **Dr. Cynthia Johnson**, Economic Development Director, Pinellas County Economic Development
- **St. Petersburg Councilmember Deborah Figgs-Sanders**, District 5

- **Jason Mathis**, CEO, The Downtown Partnership
- **Dr. Tashika Griffith**, Provost, St. Petersburg College Downtown & Midtown
- **Jillian Bandes**, Vice President, Bandes Construction & President, YIMBY St. Pete
- **Karl Nurse**, former St. Pete City Councilman, District 6

Participants

This Zoom policy dialogue was attended by 125 people* The audience was diverse, by sector. The top five largest groups registered to attend the session were:

1. Higher education (many with target sector workforce development programs)
2. Entrepreneurs (business owners)
3. Economic development practitioners
4. Local government leaders
5. Firms in construction & development (including architectural and engineering services, not duplicated in group 2)

Other sectors represented include funders and corporate partners to equity initiatives, the faith community, civil rights and civic engagement organizations, human services agencies (that manage workforce development programs), educators in Pre-K to grade 12, labor unions, financial institutions and financial services firms.

*185 unique participants logged in during the meeting; 125 participated for one hour or more.



Part 1: 8 Big Takeaways

1. Equity is a through-and-through priority for Welch

Mayor Welch revealed much about his *modus operandi* during the Policy Dialogue. If we ran a word count software on the meeting's audio, the word "priority" would surely rank in the top three words spoken by the mayor.

Two points that resounded were that a) setting clear priorities will be a key to his team's success, and b) "equity" is an overarching priority. The mayor reiterated the theme in his opening remarks:

"...The whole purpose of my campaign and the centerpiece of it was "Inclusive Progress." And in my view, equity is fundamental to that. We cannot become the best city that we can, if equity is not fundamental to that."

Welch also shed light on his management principles for the comprehensive approach. The focus on equity will not be anchored in a single department in Welch's city hall:

"Equity is not something that is extraordinary. It's not a department off in the corner. It should be just like the internet is...everything we do is touched by that, whether it's paying your bills or doing research or this meeting that we're on now, it's fundamental to the way we work."

"And that's why, in my administration, equity is not just a department, it will be part of our regular work going forward...from administrator down, under operations, everyone will know that equity is our path forward."

The mayor named staff who will lead cross-departmental adoption of his six principles. Deputy Mayor **Stephanie Owens**, along with Interim City Administrator **Tom Greene** and his number two, Assistant City Administrator **Rob Gerdes**, will spearhead the change process.

2. Achieving equity will entail a culture shift

Mayor Welch emphasized the need for a culture shift in achieving his vision for equity. In answer to a question from **Dr. Cynthia Johnson**,

Pinellas County's economic development chief, Welch said he would be intentional about communication and organizational culture:

"From the Deputy Mayor to the Interim Administrator, [equity] is a policy priority for the administration going forward and as you know, you have to communicate that throughout the organization and change culture from the way it's been done forever."

*"And not in a punitive way, but make folks understand this is the new model going forward. I think back to [former Councilman] **Ernest Fillyau** for some reason - and he always talked about process, process, process..."*

"Making it a priority is the most important thing as you bring in an administrator who has to drive that culture throughout the organization....You don't have to reinvent the wheel, but you have to be clear about what your priorities are."

Welch also delineated what "intentionality" means in application, using the example of the successful overhaul of the Pinellas County Small Business Enterprise (SBE) program (which he championed while serving as Chair of the County Commission). The mayor lauded Dr. Johnson's work in re-engineering the SBE program and identified keys to success:

"You were able to expand the SBE program exponentially and I've quoted it all year, from \$100,000 to \$20 million [in County spending with small businesses]. You expanded it in two years because you had the procedures, policies, technology, tracking and utilization was important, and also having the professional staff on the same page."

3. Welch defines equity in practical terms

During exposition of his third governing principle (informed decision making), Mayor Welch offered a definition of the term "equity," both generally speaking and as applied to the Tropicana Field project.

"...Equity is a big part of [informed decision

making]. In my mind, **equity is equal opportunity informed by facts, data, and science, and our current realities.**

"And so if you didn't have an equity lens when you look at [the Tropicana Field project], for example, well that's 86 acres, that's a blank slate. But when you mix history into that, and you're informed by **facts, data, and science**, and the history of the Gas Plant, then it's a whole different approach to how you develop Tropicana Field. So that's how equity plays in at that example."

4. Welch will be data-driven; he will rely on smart decision-making to meet head-on the housing crisis and other needs

Repeatedly throughout the meeting, Welch spoke about the need for smart, data-driven solutions in all areas of policy and investment. Housing challenges were front and center during the dialogue.

In answer to a question from former Councilman **Karl Nurse** on the extreme affordable housing shortage, the mayor made clear that his starting point will be to understand the data on current realities (which he has ordered assembled by his staff).

Welch struck the same theme in answer to a question from **Jillian Bandes**, Vice President of Bandes Construction and President of YIMBY St. Pete. On the topic of upzoning (i.e., changing regulations to allow denser housing development), Welch pointed out that the empirical data are ambiguous as to the net impact of upzoning on affordability and gentrification.

He has tasked his leadership team with getting arms around the data, *before* he makes decisions about upzoning and other ideas:

"I'm not willing to take a risk until we've got some clarity on how we don't have unintended consequences of adding density that then increases the price of housing in the surrounding area," said Welch.

Welch said he would take thoughtful actions while encouraging aggressive strategies:

"I thought staff's recommendation of a phased approach for upzoning along transit corridors was a good starting point...I support doing that and also at the same time that we bring a higher sense of urgency to truly affordable housing for folks making that \$19 or \$15 an hour.

"Just last week, there were five or six developments purchased for some \$16 million - one across from Bartlett Park and one in Harbordale. Those are truly affordable and so you've got to have a plan to try to make sure there is balance in terms of putting affordable housing on the ground and preserving affordable housing at the same time as we do the upzoning."

Welch made clear that he wants to sustain progress across multiple segments of the housing market, but that he would be most aggressive in meeting the urgent need for affordable housing.

"...As I look around me and drive down 34th Street South, for example, I see hundreds of units of luxury housing going in and only a handful of truly affordable [units] and that imbalance has to be adjusted."

5. Welch is an evolutionary; he will build on the inroads of the past, while heightening intentionality

Several times during the meeting, Welch applauded collaborative successes of the past decade, such as the ground-breaking South St. Petersburg CRA, the more recent CBA policy, and the Disparity Study completed in 2021. The latter gives the City a body of data and recommendations that enable race-conscious goal-setting for city spending in future.

But Mayor Welch made clear that these and other policies will need to be enhanced and shored up with heightened attention to goals. Welch elevated the CBA as an example:

*"The CBA that many of the folks on this call worked on, was innovation. And we've got to make sure that's implemented because quite frankly, I'm already hearing some folks push back on that and see if we can water that down. **That's not going to happen.**"*

"The way that we move forward is making sure that we are intentional about equity. Which is my next point. It can't just be something we [only] talk about. But the CBA is a great example of an opportunity to be intentional about equity and making sure it has the sixth point, a real impact.

"That's why we're all here today, is intentional impact. And I'd say another thing is that we have to get out of our silos. We have to move toward the goal of moving us all forward..."

"I think we're on a good path," said the mayor, "but I want to push higher and put more emphasis on true equitable development going forward. Whether it's housing or minority contracting or hiring, we've got a good basis, but I want to push higher."

6. Welch will make his own developer selection for the Trop project, and he will raise the bar for equity goals and outcomes

Jason Mathis, CEO of The Downtown Partnership, asked the mayor to explain his approach to equity in redevelopment of Tropicana Field. Mayor Welch applauded the work of his predecessor, Mayor **Rick Kriseman**, who created a 21-point equitable development framework for the Trop project.

Yet Welch indicated his intent to make his own developer selection for the project, which may or may not match the choice made by Kriseman late last year.

Here are excerpts from Welch's remarks:

"I've been engaged in this whole process of the master developer selection. I attended the presentations virtually and at the Coliseum. And really think the Kriseman administration did a great job in developing the RFP and was focused on those 21 points. Equity was core to that, whether it's minority contracting or hiring within the South St. Pete CRA, the housing element is important, and also the historical recognition of the history of the Gas Plant.

"All those were integrated into the RFP. But I want to push harder on the master developer that I select, to make sure that they make a significant investment in the community.

"You're talking about billions of dollars over decades that will come through there. So, I'm not looking for a pittance or a symbolic notion toward checking the box of equity. I want something built in, substantial and that will be generational as well.

"I've asked Joe Zeoli, Interim Development Administrator, to bring me a summary of the top two [proposals]. I want to understand exactly what Mayor Kriseman looked at. I've had some of that information, but you get more information when you're mayor and you ask for something.

"So, I want to go over all those things. I've got a good feel for those proposals. They're both very strong but I want to see more in terms of equity. I want to see more in terms of truly affordable housing.

"I think we can set the bar higher. I'm seeing developments and we're bragging about 10% workforce housing. We need to be aiming higher. Because in our community, when 50% of the people make less than \$24 an hour and you see so much luxury and market rate housing going up, we are entering a path to gentrification."

7. Welch values collaboration and cross-sector partnership; he will overcome political divisions to solve our biggest problems

This mayor highly values collaboration and cross-sector partnership. Councilmember **Deborah Figgs-Sanders** asked the mayor how he would overcome "the political divisions and often politicized decisions that we've seen from our city in recent months?" His response:

"It's time out for the politics. Time out for the silos and the old debts and beefs. We have a city that literally can become unaffordable [in the housing market]. We have an issue where we lead the nation in some pretty bad statistics, like the increase in rent, corporate purchases [of housing], and certainly the issue of violence that you have led on addressing. We've got to find new ways to reach those kids that somehow think putting their hands on a gun is the answer.

"That's what I'm excited about. Collaboration has to be a part of that. I look forward to

continuing collaboration. We each have roles, the legislative and budgetary roles for City Council versus administration."

Earlier in his remarks, Welch said:

"We are agnostic about where the best ideas come from. It doesn't matter if we had beef in the past or we're different parties or whatever. If it's an idea that moves us forward on an issue, we're going to put that on the table and talk about it."

"We're moving forward in terms of relationship between the mayor and council. This is my fifth day. I wasn't here before. I'm here now. The way that we have gotten things accomplished in this county - whether it was the housing trust fund or the homeless leadership board or the CRA - is by sitting down trying to unify our purpose and our goal and moving forward."

8. Welch is weighing actions in education, beginning with Pre-K

St. Petersburg College (SPC) Provost **Dr. Tashika Griffith** asked the mayor how he would work with higher education leaders to expand the educational ecosystem.

In reply, Mayor Welch touched on potential actions that spanned the Pre-K through college continuum. He voiced support for the vision of an educational ecosystem presented to him by **Dr. Tonjua Williams**, President of SPC.

His orientation will also include broadening the horizons of young people, by introducing them to career pathways, while helping them to connect to opportunity pathways. Here are some of the mayor's remarks on the topic:

"I am looking at where the fit is for the City and a large part of that fit is at the other end of the spectrum - in Pre-K education, particularly in the South St. Pete CRA, in using those dollars..."

"Building that ecosystem is important. The family of an elementary student can see the pathways that are available and then connecting them, and I think SPC does such a great job in not only four-year access and beyond but in certificate programs. Getting kids into what we used to call vocational technical, into those career academies in high school so that you can learn a trade that gives you a good wage. Dr. Williams talked about the Duke Energy program where

you can go through that and come out lineman making \$60,000.

"If you've ever had to call someone to your house for HVAC or plumbing, those are good paying jobs. So, to me, it's making sure we connect our youth to the right track..."

"K-12 is important as well in terms of mentoring through the City but also that we have a connection to young people and we're hearing from them."

"And then at Pre-K, we already have a CRA program that we're helping to fund through the CRA. I want to expand that and also see if we can bring STEAM and STEM into that as well and then using Empowerment & Innovation Centers (at Enoch Davis, Childs Park, Frank Pierce) with added adding out of school time and mentoring and tutoring programs."

When asked by Griffith what he sees as the nexus between two of his priorities - "Education & Youth Opportunities" and "Equitable Development & Business Opportunities," Welch said:

"I think bringing a vision of the opportunities that are available to our young people, so that they can see - whether they are in elementary or middle school - here are the career paths that you can have."

"And then at the other end, making sure we have opportunities for youth employment, apprentice programs, connecting young people with internships so they actually get into the mode of work. The soft skills that are needed as well..."

"That's the link that I see - getting our young folks in a position to understand the value of work, how you prepare for work. But beyond that, connecting them is key."

"When we had our youth summit [last June], we brought in kids and asked them, 'Why are we seeing the violence? And many of them said, 'We don't see a way to connect to these opportunities that y'all are talking about.'" And so, to me, making that connection is a key."

■ Below is Mayor Welch's opening statement at the January 11 equity policy dialogue, followed by his Q&A with six panelists.

Future Perspectives for Mayor Welch



As Mayor Ken Welch guides our city into its next chapter, moderators of the January 11th equity policy dialogue prepared a summary of some of the burning questions in the hearts and minds of leading practitioners in the field of economic equity. The following statement was read at the conclusion of the event.

Three Questions to Consider

Today, Mayor Welch joined equity practitioners for an initial dialogue around economic development and to raise awareness about the dozens of equity initiatives in progress in our city and county.

As we go forward, the hosts of today's session ask you to consider three questions:

- What is our common definition of Equitable Economic Development and how should the new administration define it as it revises its economic strategy?
- How will we ensure that the development of the Trop Site will be a benchmark of equity and offer "86 acres of opportunity" for all of our residents?
- How can the broader community participate in shaping equitable economic development through policy, best practices, and national models?

Next Steps in Dialogue Series

This is the just the first in an ongoing dialogue that will convene this community of practice. The Equity Institute of St. Pete and the St. Petersburg / Pinellas

Higher Education for Race Equity (SPHERE) Consortium will continue what started here today as an ongoing series.

The Equity Institute is the successor of the well-known 2020 Plan and One Community.

The SPHERE Consortium, which includes St. Petersburg College, Eckerd College, USF St. Petersburg, and Stetson College of Law, formed over a year ago to upend established racial hierarchies that oppress marginalized communities and to create academic programming, research, information resources and public engagement around racial equity.

St. Petersburg College's participation in SPHERE is centered on a new Center for Economic Inclusion and Impact, which will be a convening space for practitioner-based discussions.

Please stay tuned for these future events, and reach out to any of the organizers today with your ideas:

- **Save the Date on March 15** for the inaugural St. Petersburg Race Equity Community Forum, which will bring NYT Best Selling Author and American Economist Heather McGee.
- **In April**- The Equity Institute will hold a panel discussion on the Revitalization of the Deuces. Date TBD.
- **In June** - SPC will inaugurate the new Center for Economic Impact and Inclusion at its downtown location!

Part 2: Panelist Q&A with Mayor Ken Welch, Jan 11, 2022, Economic Equity Policy Dialogue



Above: Screenshot of Mayor Ken Welch delivering opening remarks for the January 11th equity policy dialogue. Over his shoulder are his six governing principles. The mayor repeatedly emphasized the principles throughout the Q&A with panelists and participants.

Mayor's Opening Remarks on His Prioritization of Equitable Development & Business Opportunities [Minute 9.30]

Thank you, Brother Lavender, and good afternoon to everyone. It is such an honor to be here today. I'm looking at the count; over 127 people Gypsy here for this conversation, and I think this community has shown over and over that they are ready to move forward on equity.

I'll be brief because y'all have heard me for over a year now talking about this but the whole purpose of my campaign and the centerpiece of it was "Inclusive Progress." How do we move forward as a city, as a community?

And in my view, equity is fundamental to that. We cannot become the best city that we can, if equity is not fundamental to that.

Equity is not to me something that is extraordinary. It's not a department off in the corner. It should be just like the internet is, right? Everything we do is touched by that, whether it's paying your bills or doing research or this meeting that we're on now, it's fundamental to the way we work.

And that's why in my administration, equity is not just a department, it will be part of our regular work going forward.

Over my shoulder you see the **six governing principles** that we live by. Number one is being in touch. Number two, is being inclusive, having inclusive governance so that everyone has a seat at

the table, not just to speak but to be heard. There's a difference.

Number three is informed decision making and to me equity is a big part of that. In my mind, **equity is equal opportunity informed by facts, data, and science, and our current realities.** And so, if you didn't have an equity lens when you look at [the Tropicana Field project], for example, well that's 86 acres, that's a blank slate.

But when you mix history into that, and you're informed by facts, data, and science, and the history of the Gas Plant, then it's a whole different approach to how you develop Tropicana Field. So that's how equity plays in at that example.

The fourth is innovation. We have to be able to look outside our normal protocols and methods for the problems of today, whether it's housing or reaching our youth or making sure we've got equitable development and inclusion.

We did that and Carl mentioned a lot of this going back to our housing problem. What we did on housing was innovative back in 2006. What we did with the CRA was innovative, had never been done. And now's the time for us to do some other innovative things.

The CBA that many of the folks on this call worked on, was innovation. And we've got to make sure that's implemented because quite frankly, I'm already hearing some folks push back on that and **see if we can water that down. That's not going to happen.**

The way that we move forward is making sure that we are intentional about equity. Which is my next point. It can't just be something we [only] talk about. But the CBA is a great example of an opportunity to be intentional about equity and making sure it has the sixth point, a real impact.

That's why we're all here today, is intentional impact. And I'd say another thing is that we have to get out of our silos. We have to move toward the goal of moving us all forward. And I'm so excited about what I've seen recently.

The CBA policy is a good example of that. President Matthews, what you did this summer with community conversations was a good example of that. We piggy backed off of each other and then I brought the community conversations to the youth summit at Enoch Davis. I used that same model for community conversations this December, attended by 500 people. If you look at that room that was a picture of diversity.

This is my fifth day [in office], and so, we don't have all the answers but what we do have is a mindset to make it a priority. And we've seen in the past when you make it a priority. Most of y'all know I've appointed Tom Greene as the Interim Administration, and so, from administrator down, under operations, everyone will know that equity is our path forward.

I'm very excited and I know we've got questions, so I'll save some of this, but the folks that we are appointing in our administration all have that equity lens and understand that as a priority and when you've got that foundation from the start, it helps you to move forward.

But also having the partnership with all the folks on this call and the organizations you represent will be important as well. Because you know there are always entities and principalities that want the status quo to stay in place. At the end of the day, follow the money, okay.

And we are in some cases saying that "No, you can't have maximum profits, because affordable housing is important, so you can't have maximized profits." And the same thing with housing and all other issues and so, we're going to move forward. I'm excited about this conversation on equity. Thank you.

Dr. Cynthia Johnson, EDFP, Director, Pinellas County Economic Development

Question: Mayor Welch, as Pinellas County's economy grows and the St. Petersburg area is elevated to the global stage for innovation, attraction, and entrepreneurial development, in your opinion, what are the top three strategies that local governments such as Pinellas County and St. Pete can partner to initiate smart growth approaches that help address long-standing environmental, health, and economic disparities to shape equitable and inclusive outcomes for our residents?

Mayor Welch: Great question Dr. Johnson, and it's been such an honor to work with you over the years and it's an honor to call you the director of eco dev. I'm going to turn to you as an example of how to move forward. When we expanded the SBE program, you knew how to do that already. We had an office there, but number one, you've got to make it a priority in the administration. We can check that box because it's a priority. And our Deputy Mayor Stephanie Owens will be jumping on the call in a little bit. From the Deputy Mayor to the Interim Administrator, it is a policy priority for the administration going forward and as you know you have to communicate that throughout the organization and change culture from the way it's been done forever.

And not in a punitive way but make folks understand this is the new model going forward. And so, I think back to Ernest Fillyau for some reason - and he always talked about process, process, process. And so, the process matters in the city.

And [] St. Pete has the benefit of the disparity study, and so, how much more can we do having that disparity study. You were able to expand the County SBE program exponentially and I've quoted it all year, from \$100,000 to \$20 million. You expanded it in two years because you had the procedures, policies, technology, tracking and utilization was important, and also having the professional staff on the same page.

But again, making it a priority is the most important thing as you bring in an administrator who has to drive that culture throughout the organization. We certainly did that with Barry Burton. Tom Greene is 100% on board with the City. The road forward is very clear for us.

We've also appointed Rob Gerdes as Assistant City Administrator for Strategic Initiatives. He will also drive those priorities throughout the administration, starting with housing. And so, that's the way I approach this going forward. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, but you have to be clear about what your priorities are. []

St. Petersburg City Councilmember Deborah Figgs-Sanders

Question: In order to effectively impact equity citywide there is going to need to be a strong collaboration between the mayor's office and city council. How do you plan to address collaborative strategies to foster progress for the constituents and to overcome the political divisions and often politicized decisions that we've seen from our city in recent months?

Mayor Welch: Thank you so much Councilmember Deborah Figgs-Sanders. I first want to thank you for your leadership, and I think your model of straight talk is what we need. These conversations need to be direct as we move forward. That's really the only way I know how to work is having a straight-forward conversation.

And it has to be collaborative. I mean the CRA for example. Y'all were a part of that. Many of the folks on this call. You remember the meetings at PTEC and Enoch Davis with hundreds of people. Gypsy you arranged those. You can't create a plan and say it's the community's plan if you never heard from the community. And so, it's got to be collaborative. That was the whole purpose of the Community Conversations [hosted in December] and those will continue.

But in terms of partnership with the City Council, it's vital. I feel empowered because I'm not bound

by the Sunshine Law. So, I can sit down with you Councilmember Figgs-Sanders and talk about what's happening in your district, and not just your district, but your ideas for how we move forward on citywide and regional issues.

Part of leadership is understanding you're not the smartest person in the room, nor do you have to be the smartest person in the room. You have to get the ideas from folks who are subject matter experts and then bring it together in a way that has the impact you want. []

We are agnostic about where the best ideas come from. It doesn't matter if we had beef in the past or we're different parties or whatever. If it's an idea that moves us forward on an issue, we're going to put that on the table and talk about it.

We're moving forward in terms of relationship between the mayor and council. This is my fifth day. I wasn't here before. I'm here now. The way that we have gotten things accomplished in this county - whether it was the housing trust fund or the homeless leadership board or the CRA - is by sitting down trying to unify our purpose and our goal and moving forward.

It's rime out for the politics. Time out for the silos and the old debts and beefs. We have a city that literally can become unaffordable. We have an issue where we lead the nation in some pretty bad statistics - like the increase in rent, corporate purchases [of housing], and certainly the issue of violence that you have led on addressing. We've got to find new ways to reach those kids that somehow think putting their hands on a gun is the answer.

That's what I' excited about doing. Collaboration has to be a part of that. I look forward to continuing collaboration. We each have roles, the legislative and budgetary roles for City Council versus administration.

Jason Mathis, CEO, The Downtown Partnership

Question 1: You have spoken passionately and eloquently about your personal experience and your family's history with Black neighborhoods that were removed prior to the construction of Tropicana Field. The redevelopment of these 86 acres is a generational opportunity to create economic prosperity for the entire city, but especially for St. Pete's Black community. In fact, equity has been underscored as the fundamental value in making decisions about the future of this site and was highlighted in the proposals that were submitted to the Kriseman Administration. What are your plans to emphasize equity in this historic project and how can the larger community best support your efforts to ensure this site is developed in the right way?

Mayor Welch: Thank you Jason and thank you for your leadership with the Downtown Partnership. You know I've been engaged in this whole process of the master developer selection. I attended the presentations virtually and at the Coliseum. And really think the Kriseman admin did a great job in developing the RFP and was focused on those 21 points. Equity was core to that, whether it's minority contracting or hiring within the South St. Pete CRA, the housing element is important, and also the historical recognition of the history of the Gas Plant.

So, I think all those were integrated into the RFP. But I want to push harder on the master developer that I select, to make sure that they make a significant investment in the community.

You're talking about billions of dollars over decades that will come through there. So, I'm not looking for a pittance or a symbolic notion toward checking the box of equity. I want something built in, substantial and that will be generational as well.

And so, I am excited about the process thus far. I'm mtg with our cabinet. I've asked Joe Zeoli who is our Interim Development Services Administration, he's taken the place of Alan Delisle, to bring me a summary of the top two [proposals]. I want to understand exactly what Mayor Kriseman looked at. I've had some of that information, but you get more information when you're mayor and you ask for something.

So, I want to go over all those things. I've got a good feel for those proposals. They're both very strong but I want to see more in terms of equity. I want to see more in terms of truly affordable housing.

I think we can set the bar higher. I'm seeing developments and we're bragging about 10 % workforce housing. That's not...we need to be aiming higher. Because in our community, when 50% of the people make less than \$24 an hour and you see so much luxury and market rate housing going up, we are entering a path to gentrification.

And so, I think we're on a good path, but I want to push higher and put more emphasis on true equitable development going forward. Whether it's housing or minority contracting or hiring, we've got a good basis, but I want to push higher.

Question 2: COVID has highlighted the critical importance of digital inclusion for neighborhoods and families across the city. If people do not have access to technology, access the internet or the skills to engage with new technologies, there is a great possibility that they will be left behind. There are real social justice and racial equity questions associated with digital inclusion. The national Build Back Better agenda includes significant resources for supporting digital inclusion. These are funds that St. Pete can go after to provide access to more people throughout our city. What are your plans to support digital inclusion from a City Administration program and again, what can the larger community do to support your effort to make sure everyone has access to the technologies that will drive education and business development for our entire city?

Mayor Welch: Great question. I'll start at the end of that question. What the community can do is stay engaged. Also give us your ideas, if you have ideas on how we can address these issues, we want to hear those ideas. We have developed **opportunity agendas** - for youth opportunities, for housing opportunities, for South St. Petersburg. Digital access affects all of us. We assume that everyone has access to a device. That was laid bare during the pandemic. We said we'll shut down schools. But half the students don't have access to technology or much less having a home. Many of our students are homeless.

And so, the digital inclusion piece is big. What I want to do is upgrade or replace our community centers so that they are modernized. So that they are true hubs. We're calling them Empowerment & Innovation Centers.

If you look at what the County did in Lealman at the Lealman Exchange, that's the model I'm looking at. You can't have an old building that's brick and mortar, that kids don't want to come to or the community doesn't want to come to. We need to upgrade those. We've got funding to do that. [These centers], certainly that's a hub for resilience, nutrition and others. Digital access will be part of that

Also, you know I took a trip to the White House to talk about the Biden infrastructure bill, and also the Build Back Better plan. Broadband is a part of those as well as affordable housing. So, I really want to emphasize putting us in a position to draw down those funds as much as possible, so that we can make sure that digital access is really a utility. It's not something special. It's something everyone has. More and more, you need that just to navigate our society

Also, I've talked with some mayors who've gone down this path and we will learn from their experience. It's more than just giving them a device, it's wrap around, a holistic approach. It's pulling down those federal funds but also seeing what works best in other parts of the country.

Dr. Tashika Griffith, Provost, St. Petersburg College Downtown & Midtown

SPC, along with a consortium of local higher education leaders, has established the *Center for Economic Impact & Inclusion* at SPC, which will serve as a convening hub for research and

advancement of workforce development through an economic equity lens.

Question 1: In what ways do you plan to work with local higher education leaders to expand the educational ecosystem and partner with the Center to address workforce development needs?

Mayor Welch: You know this is another one of my loves as well - education. Thank you for your leadership and all that you've done. I am looking at where the fit is for the City and a large part of that fit is at the other end of the spectrum - in Pre-K education, particularly in the South St. Petersburg CRA in using those dollars.

But it expands to K-12 and certainly post-secondary, and I count SPC as a great partner in that. We met with Dr. Williams, and she gave us the PowerPoint of where she is going. So much energy. So much vision. Building that ecosystem is important. The family of an elementary student can see the pathways that are available and then connecting them, and I think SPC does such a great job in not only four-year access and beyond but in certificate programs. Getting kids into what we used to call vocational technical, into those career academies in high school so that you can learn a trade that gives you a good wage. Dr. Williams talked about the Duke Energy program where you can go through that and come out lineman making \$60,000.

If you've ever had to call someone to your house for HVAC or plumbing, those are good paying jobs. So, to me, it's making sure we connect our youth to the right track but also the fundamental skills to change gears at some time. We've all had to do that at some point. And so, I view SPC as a critical partner in that.

K-12 is important as well in terms of mentoring through the City but also that we have a connection to young people and we're hearing from them.

And then at Pre-K, we already have a CRA program that we're helping to fund through the CRA. I want to expand that and also see if we can bring STEAM and STEM into that as well and then using those Empowerment and Innovation Centers (Enoch Davis, Childs Park, Frank Pierce) have tools that can support that, adding out of school time and mentoring and tutoring.

It is all integrated. The City has different roles to play, and I'm looking forward to working with SPC as well.

Question 2: You have stated that two of your priorities are "Education and Youth Opportunities" and "Equitable Development and Business Opportunities." What do you see as the nexus between the two?

Mayor Welch: I think bringing a vision of the opportunities that are available to our young people, so that they can see - whether they are in elementary or middle school - here are the career paths that you can have.

And then at the other end, making sure we have opportunities for employment, youth employment, apprentice programs, connecting young people with internships so they actually get into the mode of work. The soft skills that are needed as well.

And so, that's the link that I see - getting our young folks in a position to understand the value of work, how you prepare for work. What's the biggest thing: "Show up. Show up on time. And show up dressed appropriately. Those are the basics."

But beyond that, connecting them is key. "Here's a path that you can go to" in say the arts for example. Alex Harris talks about how much STEAM is involved in putting on a show.

If we can connect kids in ways that excite them; as you know Dr. Griffith, every person is different. A four year degree may not be something that's a passion but if a kid can work with technology and go to work in a year, that might be the path they want. So, to me it's making that connection.

When we had our youth summit on June 1st we brought in kids at Enoch Davis and asked them, "Why are we seeing the violence? And many of them said, "We don't see a way to connect to these opportunities that y'all are talking about." And so, to me, making that connection is a key.

Jillian Bandes, Vice President, Bandes Construction & President, YIMBY St. Pete

Background/Question: Previous affordable housing research, such as the Chicago study, showed that upzoning did not have an impact on housing affordability. Newer research, such as a roundup of six studies out of UCLA, shows that upzoning does have an impact on housing affordability. These new studies show that upzoning, or increasing residential density, really works to bring down surrounding rents and home prices. From your past work on the County Commission, we know you have a reputation for doing the reading and making sure you understand all sides of an issue. Are you also comfortable changing positions based on new research and ideas? Who are the major players within your administration who will also be responsible for doing the reading, and making sure the mayor's office is advocating for strong public policy?

Mayor Welch: Thank you Jillian for your leadership and your hard work. We've talked about this many times. So, kind of working backwards from the question. [Yes], you have to be willing to take new info and incorporate it into your decision making and so, absolutely I'm willing to take a look at new information as it impacts our decision on upzoning.

I have a different opinion with you on the impact. Michael Storper from UCLA has an article out that says basically just the opposite. But he also had some ways that upzoning can work if you have certain provisions and criteria. One of the things he talked about is if you allow quad units then what keeps the developers from putting in luxury or high end quad units that will then increase the cost of housing? Can you put a stipulation in there that a certain amount have to be affordable?

So, I think there are ways to get there but I've seen as you said both sides of the case: it increases affordability, it decreases affordability; it increases gentrification; it decreases gentrification.

So, I'm not willing to take a risk until we've got some clarity on how we don't have unintended consequences of adding density that then increases the price of housing in the surrounding area.

I thought staff's recommendation of starting in a phased approach for upzoning along those transit corridors was a good starting point. And as I said during our summit at Allstate during the campaign, I support doing that and also at the same time that we bring a higher sense of urgency to truly affordable housing for folks making that \$19 or \$15 an hour.

Because as I look just last week, there were five or six developments purchased for some \$16 million - one across from Bartlett Park and one in Harbordale. Those are truly affordable and so, you've got to have a plan to try to make sure there is balance in terms of putting affordable housing on the ground and preserving affordable housing at the same time as we do the upzoning...

I want to do them both. I don't want you think I don't want to do the workforce. I just don't want to do something that makes the problem with having it affordable worse. I want to do them at the same time.

The person leading my priority on that is Rob Gerdes - I've appointed him as Assistant City Administrator, second to Tom Greene. He's leading strategic initiatives and his first strategic initiative is housing. So, we want to bring all the tools to bear. I'm open to hearing all the info you have.

But I'm really adamant that we do both at the same time, because as I look around me and drive down 34th street s for example - I see hundreds of units of luxury housing going in and only a handful of truly affordable [units] and that imbalance has to be adjusted.

Karl Nurse, former St. Petersburg City Councilman, District 6

Background:

- 1) Rental and sale prices for housing in Tampa Bay are up 25% in 2021 with similar projections moving forward,
- 2) The demand for additional housing since 2014 has averaged over 1,000 units annually for primary residential housing - not 2nd homes,
- 3) The net supplied, after teardowns, has averaged about 850 units,
- 4) The overwhelming share are priced near the top of the market, and many are 2nd homes, particularly downtown, which do not help with the need,
- 5) The city intends to spend all of the \$20 million in ACRA housing funds for the lowest (under 60% of median income) to deeply subsidize about 225 units,
- 6) Every income level, except the highest, is being under supplied which forces up housing costs at every level.
- 7) Only 7% of new units are ADU's, Duplexes or 3-4 unit housing units.
- 8) Shortage of housing for the bottom 80% of the market is between 500 and 800 units annually beyond the current housing programs.

Question: The current path will result is steadily tightening housing supply and rising prices. How are you prepared to allocate resources and change policies to significantly increase the construction of ADU's, duplexes and small apartment buildings to help close the gap of 500 to 800 middle class and affordable housing units annually?

Mayor Welch: Thank you Karl for your leadership not only on the CRA but many other issues. You've laid out some great information and part of moving forward is knowing what the current state is. I asked my staff today in a cabinet meeting to give me the current inventory of housing and what the trends have been over the last few years. You know there's no place to go and get that data and we should have that.

But what we're seeing on the street is exactly what you said. It's much more weighted toward luxury and market rate [housing] going in. **What I intend to do is triad:**

- Number one, making sure our processes are up to date with business process improvements. Looking at the time it takes for permitting and planning and making sure that time is minimized.
- [Number two], making sure that we make this a priority, and we've done that by appointing Rob Gerdes to lead this and make sure that he can work cross functionally within the organization.
- [Number three], the final piece is subsidy. We've got funding out there at a local source. It's certainly not enough but I want to fully utilize what we have in Penny for Pinellas and the CRA where we rolled over \$4 million, I believe that could've been applied to housing.

Also, that we are aggressive about going after the federal funds. This is what the bipartisan infrastructure bill, the Build Back Better bill, both look at affordable housing as something they want to help local government with. That's my approach with it. Just as when we took on the CRA Karl, folks said it couldn't be done. We made it a priority, and working in partnership, we made that happen - I want to do the same thing in housing.

The urgency here that's different from the CRA is that the land is being bought up and I want to be aggressive and do things that are innovative. For example, why can't we purchase land and hold it and work with partners to bring affordable housing to those sites. ■ **End**

Part 3: Participant Q&A with Mayor Ken Welch, Jan 11, 2022, Economic Equity Policy Dialogue

Time 00:53:03

Gypsy Gallardo: Good day! Great timing everybody we have 38 minutes left for open mic audience Q & A. We do have at least five folks who have tagged and are in-line to ask a question. So, for the rest of you, please be brief in stating your question, we want exchanges of a maximum of at least 3 minutes including the mayors answers, so that we can get as many questions in as possible. We will take questions afterwards and bring those back to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and his Economic Development Chief for further elucidation. So, let's go ahead and jump in. I just want to make one quick mention of a fact that Carl mentioned really briefly that Mayor Welch is the first mayor in the history of St. Petersburg to stake a day 1 priority on equitable economic development. Each of his predecessors has taken us farther towards equitable economic growth. This will be the first time that a mayor is asking his team and cabinet for a comprehensive top to bottom through and through focus on equity and development and business opportunities. And so, thank you for that Mayor Welch.

First question will come from Albert Lee, President of the Tampa Bay Black Business Investment Corporation. Albert.

00:54:30

Albert Lee: Good afternoon, Brother Mayor and thank you for being here and congratulations again on your win. I couldn't be prouder to have been there the night of your election victory party. It was just an awesome scene. And so, we've been working here in St. Petersburg with a number of the individuals that are on this call to help try and bring more capital to small businesses and opportunities to small businesses, and we want to make sure that we continue doing that with your administration. But I want to give you an opportunity to look at a canvas and provide the paint. I know you, you're very thoughtful in the things you say, and I know you've had a chance to kind of think through the vision. Being a person that's from St. Petersburg, has seen the evolution of St. Petersburg, if you're looking at St. Petersburg 20 years from now, and you've been a very successful mayor, the things that you want to implement in your administration come to fruition, and you're walking down the street, what do you see? When you look at that St. Petersburg, what do you envision that all these equity initiatives and things would bring forth?

00:55:51

Mayor Welch: Wow, I'm supposed to do this in 3 minutes Brother Lee. Thank you for that question. Man, what a question. I see a revitalized 16th Street. I see a revitalized Deuces. I see the centers where our kids can go feel safe and have access to technology, hubs for nutrition, mentoring, afterschool programs, places for our seniors that are modern and updated with all the amenities that they need. I see a community that is resilient. That has not been displaced by sea level rise in our changing coastline. that we haven't had folks from the coast move in and purchase all the affordable housing and then displace the folks that are there. And so, all those things work together. So we have to be innovated in the coastal high hazard area right, to make sure that where we can, we can still adapt and have some housing there. We've also got to empower folks that are in the South St. Pete CRA for example, to be able to stay in their homes, to develop new home ownership and rental, affordable units in those areas. but also, that we've got true incubators, not just on 4th street, but also on the Deuces, on 16th Street, for the businesses and for entrepreneurial and then the support for those folks who want to go open their own business. And so, I see that kind of equality of economic opportunity that you see in downtown St. Pete, that you see it on the Deuces, that you see it when you move West and South, and so, that's my vision if you're talking about 20-

30 years from now. Thank you for the question.

00:57:40

Gypsy: Thank you Mayor. Thank you, Albert. Next, we have Chris Steinocher, President and CEO of the St. Petersburg Area Chamber.

00:57:50

Chris Steinocher: Thank you Gypsy. I hope you can hear me alright. And well done! This kind of gathering is my kind of jam!

Mayor welcome, we're glad you are here today. The business sector plays a big role in economic development, and we've been a great partner in the county and city throughout the years. Help our business community understand your challenge to us now on this equity economic development platform. Um, you and I have worked closely on it. What is the challenge to our community? What can the business community do to step up as we have gone through our equity programs and processes, our businesses invest a lot of money in it, I don't know if we're heading in the right direction or not. So, with your leadership, help us understand what the challenge is for our businesses? How can we impact your agenda to make sure that we indeed are the most successful business in the world for this effort? And then again, what is the role of a chamber in the effort like this? Help me be a good partner to you.

00:58:47

Mayor Welch: Chris, great question again. You guys are only giving me three minutes to do this. This is like a three-day seminar. But Chris, you've really set the tone, let me say in your leadership of making sure folks are focused on equity. To the business community I would say, don't be afraid. I mean everyone is trying to move forward and so, it's not a punitive look, it's not accusatory, it's how do we get better. So, take an honest look at what you're doing for access.

Take an honest look at your employee base. Does it look like St. Pete? If not, why not? You just can't say folks aren't available. What steps have you made intentionally to go out beyond the normal places you would look for employees. Look at your boards as well. I've had some issues lately, where I think if a board had been more diverse, someone would have raised a red flag and said no you can't do that, and you need to actually go the other way. And so, it's always about getting better. I think the mindset for equity is there. The intent is there. The work of equity is a little bit harder and ...

1:00

Gypsy: Carl maybe frozen but Mayor Welch we're going to keep going. Did you want to wrap up that thought?

1:00:10

Mayor Welch: No but that's it Chris. Let's have that free communication and it's got to be without fear.

1:00:15

Gypsy: Ok thank you Chris. Sir, we have Dr. Howard with us. Dr Howard...

1:00:21

Dr. Charee Howard: Hi and congratulations Mayor Welch! A brief question if you may, 3 minutes may not be long enough, but I wanted to know, have you considered a plan to address healthcare disparities, especially in the midtown area?

1:00:39

Mayor Welch: That is a great question. I have not looked at that specifically beyond kind of the broad issue of, you know the Urban League working with them. We purchased a health vehicle that does kind of remote services. Um, we work with Johnnie Ruth Clark. You know most of my work has been on pandemic stuff, making sure we have testing and those kinds of things. But those

disparities as you know are a reality, it's part of a history of structural racism and poverty, and those impacts on mental and physical health. And so, I'm always open to ways that we can improve that. My focus has been on access, and that's primarily been through organizations like Johnnie Ruth Clark and community health centers, but that needs to be a part of what we do. So, if you've got any ideas or thoughts, maybe we can get together, but that should be a part of what we do. Thank you for bringing that forward.

1:01:37

Dr. Howard: Absolutely and thank you for your response.

1:01:41

Gypsy: Thank you, Dr. Howard. Randy Russell, President of the Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete was third. Is Randy still with us?

1:01:54

Carl Lavender: No, he is not. He had to log off. But his question was, to what extent does the administration plan to be intentional of engaging lived experience from the communities in decision making and policy development going forward?

1:02:07

Mayor Welch: Great questions. I would call it a slow hanging curve because intentionality is part of the governing principles we have. You know that's why we have the community conversations and ask folks to come out; tell us what they thought about us, about education, about infrastructure, about business opportunities. And so, to me to be successful you have to be intentional because we don't have all the answers to all these issues but, I think the answers are out in the community certainly in terms of what we can look at, in terms of at best practices. So, intentionality is core to what we do.

1:02: 47

Gypsy: Ok. So, we are trying to monitor hands raising and chat; Esther Mathews is helping out. So please forgive us if we miss you, and please re-raise your hands. We're going to hear next from Linda Marcelli, Chair of the Board of the Pinellas County Urban League.

1:03:11

Carl: Mrs. Marcelli are you on the call?

1:03:16

Gypsy : Ok. We will move to Hayes Fountain.

1:03:24

Hayes Fountain: Hello, Hello. Mayor congratulations and great to see you again. Wonderful tie selection, and certainly (laughing; unable to hear audio clearly). In my, pretty much a layup, I think if I just need to know the right person, but as you chaired the Pinellas County Board, there were often times challenges with the actually measuring these programs. How many small businesses? How much diversity, equity and inclusion is really happening? And it had systems in place. What has changed, and how will you actually measure the effectiveness of these programs that your implementing?

1:04:14

Mayor Welch: Thank you, Hayes, great questions and good to see you again. Thank you for giving your input as a businessperson as we were shaping the program with the county under Dr. Johnson's lead, and that's really to me the blueprint. You know, she really brought in the software to track utilization. She did the outreach to businesses, went to where businesses were, meeting in the community at Lakewood and other places, so that's the approach. I can't disclose it yet, but we've got an opening for a purchasing director and that person needs to come with that same set of experiences, the ability to implement that kind of utilization and tracking, and make sure that we're making a real impact. That will be an important appointment and hire, and I'm really excited

about some of the candidates that we're looking at for that. So, I see us as emulating what the county has already done, in terms of systems, in terms of policies, in terms of outreach, all of those things. And we've got the benefit of a disparity study behind us to do it that. And so, to me, it's full steam ahead.

1:05:27

Mr. Fountain: Thank you so much sir.

1:05:29:

Mayor Welch: Thank you Hayes.

1:05:30

Gypsy: Thank you for being here. I understand you recently moved or have a business presence in the county. Thank you. Next, we have Valerie Hyman, followed by Erica Hall so get your questions ready, followed by Aaron Dietrich. Those are the next three in line. If we could hear from Valerie, please.

1:05:54

Valerie Hyman: Thanks, so good to be here. Mayor Welch, obviously as you've acknowledged and you know the issue of getting more workforce housing in the city, in addition to affordable housing, is multi-layered. It clearly goes beyond zoning.

So, my question is, how do you intend to involve the private sector? In other words, getting beyond subsidies, getting beyond money from taxpayers, and getting the companies that are actually making the money from these people who have such low hourly wages and getting them to put money on the table to help address this housing emergency?

1:06:38

Mayor Welch: That's a great question Valerie and thank you for bringing that forward. You and I have talked before about the issue. I think we have to use our leverage to do that. St. Pete is a place where folks want to come now. We were talking about some deals that were made long ago, and I think the posture then was we were almost desperate as a city to get development downtown. If you remember, Bay Plaza, Pier Park, all those failed. Well, we're not in that position anymore. Folks want to come here. And so, if you don't ask, you don't get. And as I've said earlier, when I see 10% workforce housing on a project, we need more than that. We need affordable housing as well. I think by making it a priority, making sure that we have engagement with those developers so they understand our priorities, and that it will be a factor in the decisions we make in the selection. I think the private sector is smart enough to understand what is being asked for, and they will shape their proposals to fit that so that they can win. You're talking about matters of scale of profit, right? So, if you need to dial your profit down a little bit in order to fulfill that important community need, I think a smart businessperson would do that. And so, that's the approach we'll take.

1:08:02

Valerie: I was also actually wondering about money from mortgage lenders and banks?

1:08:07

Gypsy: Valerie, for the sake of honoring the many requests here, can we have you follow-up an email with that question? Thank you so much.

Let's go to Erica Hall next.

1:08:26

Erica Hall: Thank you Gypsy and everyone for putting this together. Congratulations Mayor Welch! Very happy and honored to say that. My question is two-fold. The first part of it was regarding environmental equity. You touched on briefly, sea level rising, but yes, I wanted to know that economic equity is critical for our success, however equity also means our environmental equity, particularly around climate change in our area, alarming sea level rising, and coastal high hazard areas which you mentioned are important. Unfortunately, a lot of communities of color in this city

live in those areas, so, the first part of my question is what your administration plans around environmental equity? And then second, the food insecurity is very important as well. So, how do we bring food justice and equity to food insecure neighborhoods throughout St. Petersburg? Thank you for your time.

1:09:32

Mayor Welch: Thank you Erica and thank you for your leadership. Now again, on a lot of these I can't get down to details, but here are my thoughts. On equity, I talked about making sure we realize our impact on zoning and land decisions, so we are not displacing where the truly affordable housing is. When we make a decision on something like up-zoning that we understand that in certain cases, it has actually increased the price of housing, so we can all be aware of those unintended consequences and make sure that we are mitigating those kinds of impacts. That we bring an urgency to the truly affordable housing and then talk about things such as adaptation. You know, if you are struggling with the cost of housing or rent, then you really don't have the funds to make your home more resilient. And we see folks even fall into the issue of codes affecting their impact. So, if you've got tools like the CRA, dollars that can be used for that. If you've got federal funding, that can be used for that. I want to bring the tools down that connect it to folks so that they can, are in a postured position to adapt and be resilient as we move forward. And you know resiliency is not just infrastructure, its human resiliency as well. And so, to me, that's part of equity moving forward. Even in terms of literacy, making sure folks understand the issues, whether its financial literacy, or dealing with environmental literacy, I want to find new ways to communication with folks who aren't going to come on a Zoom like this, or go to a city website, so can we go through our churches, our faith-based organizations, or community organizations to get that information out to people. Information is key, and so, many folks are just trying to live day to day and put food on their table, and they're not getting this information.

When you get a text, as I got just a few minutes ago, with an offer to buy my house, you know folks get those all the time. And if I know someone, my mom knows someone who sold their house, now they're renting the house that they use to own because they couldn't find anything comparable, and so, that kind of financial literacy is part of this as well.

On the food issue, I think there are ways that we can be innovate. We've got a great Urban youth Farm. Can we grow that, expand that, make that a hub for fresh fruits and vegetables? Can we work with some of the small convenient stores to have them carry some fresh fruit and vegetables? We'll continue to work on the issue of Tangerine Plaza. I'm reviewing the proposal that Mayor Kriseman had in terms of having a small grocery store there. But that is an issue that we will continue to look at, not only in a traditional way, but can we innovate as well, co-op and other ways to try to address that issue of having, needing nutritional foods throughout our city, but particularly in South St. Pete

1:12:34

Gypsy: Ok, I'm noticing we have a Mayor who actually thinks deeply, studies and answers questions. So next we have Aaron Dietrich, but we want folks to be ready, so Renee Edwards you are next. Iman Askia Muhammad Aquil, and then Tim Dutton, followed by Jessica Estevez. So, Aaron Dietrich if we can hear from you, please.

1:12:57

Aaron Dietrich: Thank you so much guys and congratulations Mr. Mayor. This is an inspiring conversation and I really appreciate the pragmatism people are bringing to the table. I've been working with the people council around the housing crisis to have emergency meetings and to see how people want to address some of these concerns. We're looking at immediate fixes to keep people from suffering the fate of displacement, and we're even looking at some creative possibilities that could look at rent stabilization, rent control on a voluntary basis for folks who are renting those houses out but seeing their property taxes increase at an exorbitant rate. What can we do to kind of bring those folks together for those landlords that might agree to help on the backend with their property taxes? I think there is a lot of spirit of solutions on the table, on the

immediate, but what you bring up is important for the long term, but the short term doesn't make sense without a plan...

1:13:58

Carl: Aaron, let's get to the question my friend

1:14:02

Aaron: The question was really, I just wanted to know as we look forward at federal, county funds, a big question we have in the community is, is the city ready to prepare to look at increasing funding in the city budget for the area of affordable housing as we try to get to the long-term solutions? Thank you so much.

1:14:22

Mayor Welch: Thank you Aaron and thank you for your leadership, and I look forward to our dialogue on these issues, because I always think there is a way to get to the impact that we want, and so, I look forward to having that discussion with you. Absolutely, I'm open to looking in the budget to increase our funding. I tend to look to other places first, so you know we've got a huge pot of federal funding dollars and when we visited the White House, President and Vice-President Harris were adamant that those dollars were meant to come down to local governments. There's a portion that will go to states due to formula, but they also were adamant that equity was a huge part of that funding. And so, we need to pull those dollars down to the degree we can do that. We don't have to raise our local taxes. You know, we've got an issue now where we're dealing with the water issue, through the integrated water resources master plan, which is now called the St. Pete Water plan, to deal with that consent decree, but you may know we're pulling \$9 million a year out of the Pennies for Pinellas to pay for fixing the water system. If you did not have that, you could use that \$9 million for those community centers, for housing, for other projects. And so, I want to, if we can pull down infrastructure dollars to fix the water system and free up some of that \$9 million, there's money right there without having to raise taxes or doing anything else.

So, we're looking at every option we have Aaron to meet the need, the critical need is housing. I hear it from millennials, I hear it from folks that are middle-aged, I hear it from employers. Housing is the issue, and we're going to bring every resource to bear on that. Sorry for the long answers, but I can't do this in 30 seconds.

1:16:14

Gypsy: We've learned our lesson and we're grateful Mayor. Renee has asked us to skip beyond her. Iman Askia...

1:16:30

Iman Askia Muhammad Aquil: Good afternoon and peace and blessings be upon you and congratulations Mayor Welch. Thank you for your lengthy service in the community. I heard you mention in passing just a few moments ago, the importance of engaging the faith community, both in terms of helping to get information to the community, but also in helping deliver the goals you have articulated and identified. I know from your own personal experience that you know how important faith is personally and institutionally. Can we count on you, and can we offer you our assistance through the Collective Empowerment Group of the Tampa Bay area to help rally faith leaders and leverage their assets and influence in our community to accomplish the specific things you have identified?

1:17:21

Mayor Welch: Absolutely Iman. I would love for us, once we get past this Omicron spike, to actually have a meeting. I know the faith leaders are tremendously, but I would love to hear their input. And when it's time to get an issue out into the community, I think having the faith leaders as folks to get those messages out would be vital yes, absolutely look forward to continuing that partnership, and I want to thank you for all you do as well.

1:17:52

Gypsy: ok thank you so much. Tim Dutton.

0:17:56

Carl Lavender: Tim is off the call

1:17:58

Gypsy: Ok, let's move onto to Jessica Estevez

1:18:02

Jessica Estevez: Good afternoon, everybody! Thank you so much! So excited to be a part of this conversation.

As you know the Latinx/Latino population is growing, over 5 million Latino people call Florida home, so we're growing. Even in Pinellas County, we know 10% are Latinos. I would love to know your thoughts, because this is still a hidden community. They are still a little invisible, invisibilized, I just made up a word, in our region. And I'm wondering what is your administrations strategy for engaging this community, and maybe how you're looking to prioritize this representation and listening to a group that is a little hidden and often invisible in our region?

1:18:50

Mayor Welch: Well, that's a great question and it is something that is on my radar. As a county commissioner we had much more of a Latinx presence in the Clearwater area, and having led the complete count committee for the census, and having to deal with an administration that was trying not to have folks counted, I'll just say that, with the whole citizenship question and those kinds of things, we worked through the Hispanic Outreach center and made a lot of contacts, and we were very successful. So, I want to follow that same model down here. You know a lot of it is a question of who the organizations are that are primarily the voice in the Latinx community, you can help us with that. Please make sure I've got your name and contact information so that we can reach out to you so that you can give us some advice or council going forward. But it's kind of having that open door policy and letting the community know that we want them to be part of what we're doing. And you're right, St. Pete needs to kind of ramp up what we're doing.

So, if you're willing, I want to kind of count on you to help out Jessica.

1:20:00

Gypsy: Ok, I believe we also have the Hispanic Chamber represented here today, Mayor. And next we're going to take Linda Marcelli and Pastor

1:20:28

Linda Marcelli: Thank you Gypsy and congratulations Mr. Mayor. This is a stunning group of people and leaders, and it's just as wonderful to be a part of that and I look forward to what you're going to do for all of us, and what we're going to do with you for all of us and for this city.

I am no longer chair of the Urban League. Rodney Wilson is doing a great job at that and being a great chair at the Urban League. As I've said before, one of my big concerns is the education of our children, and in particular the reading gap between African American and White children. I just think it's the foundation of so much in equity and so many unhappy lives. Do you see yourself being able to look at that and doing something about it?

1:21: 22

Mayor Welch: Absolutely Linda! Thank you for all your leadership in that area. Some of the folks on this call might know my history, but the first office I ran for was school board in 98, and I lost that. It's obviously the best investment we can make. So many of our young folks are behind when they get to kindergarten. I mean they don't have that basic phonics and those kinds of things, so that's why I'm focusing initially on what we can do to support pre-k and make sure it's a quality experience at our childcare centers and family daycare homes. I think that's where we can make the initial investment, and anything we can do to K-12, whether its mentoring or those empowerment and

innovation centers, the out of school time, I want us to be engaged there. I had a great conversation with Leah McCrae, and she's got some ideas we can do to enhance what we're doing, but again it's all partnership, working with those schools, working with even SPC and USF to make sure we've got, what Dr. Williams said, "a real ecosystem".

So, Linda, education is at my heart. It's the best investment we can make, and I'm committed to do that.

1:22:39

Linda: Amen! Thank you, Mayor!

1:22:42

Gypsy: Pastor Siplin

1:22:46

Pastor Elizabeth Siplin: Hello Sir! Congratulations.

So, I'm going to be very direct. We have an initiative with the NAACP, I'm the Economic Development Chairperson, so we're very focused. I know you're very focused on the beautification of our city. Some of the things I do see a disparity in is when we, you know the mentality of crossing the railroad tracks. When you go into the Black communities, you see all the disparities, the stores, the gas stations. We have a whole study of where we have taken pictures of craters, just environmental discrepancy across the board. So, I want to know if your administration is willing to partner, or do you have an initiative where we're not just singling out our downtown beautification, but a whole city-wide process of bringing us all up to an equitable infrastructure and focus?

1:23:47

Mayor Welch: Thank you Pastor. And, yes you jumped right to the point, I'm going to jump right to the point as well because what you bring up is very important. You shouldn't be able to go to one part of the city and see a drastic change from other parts of the city. I know that Councilmember Deborah Figgs-Saunders has talked about the issue of sanitation, litter and trash, and why it looks different on 18th or 22nd. It shouldn't look that way. So, we're going to focus on that in terms of city services to make sure there is no differences in the services that we provide, and the intention of those services in all parts of the city.

On the other side of that is the community has a responsibility as well. When you wake up and go down 16th street after a night of partying, that's not the city's fault. And so, we've got to have an honest conversation about what's happening there. And I have lived that. My dad's office is 1601 16th Street South. Part of my ritual waking up was cleaning up things I don't even want to talk about on this phone call. And so, we've got to be accountable as well as a community. And so, we're going to make sure the city does what we're supposed to do, but the community has to do their part as well. We'll talk to those landlords, store owners as well to try to get them to do their responsible part as well. You know we're all in this together, but I will be a lead spokesperson on what we need to be to make sure all parts of our community are places that we want to live and work.

1:25:30

Gypsy: And Mayor, I want to acknowledge that we have several other folks, but we are out of time.

Dontriel Lawson, we hear you. We definitely will get these questions to the mayor if you follow up.

I also want to acknowledge the presence of County Commissioner Renee Flowers, who occupies the seat previously held by our mayor. Thank you so much.

And a special thank you to Nikki Gaskin-Capehart, who is here with us today, who is a shero beyond measure, and responsible for so much of our impact in recent years, and with that Carl let me give this back to you please. Thank you. ■ **End**