

**CHARLOTTE COUNTY – PUNTA GORDA**

**METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

MINUTES OF THE MPO BOARD SPECIAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

MURDOCK ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING

18500 MURDOCK CIRCLE, ROOM #119

PORT CHARLOTTE FL 33948

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Commissioner Joseph Tiseo,** Charlotte County Commissioner, MPO Chair

**Commissioner Christopher G. Constance,** MD, Charlotte County Commissioner, MPO Vice Chair

**Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch,** Charlotte County Commissioner

**Commissioner James Herston**, Charlotte County Airport Authority

**Mayor Lynne Matthews**, Punta Gorda City Council

**STAFF PRESENT**

Gary Harrell, MPO Director

Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Principal Planner

Betty-Ann Sherer, MPO Planner

Janette S. Knowlton, Charlotte County Attorney (MPO Legal Services)

Heather Bacus, Charlotte County Human Resources

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Joel Graeff, MPO Director Applicant

D’Juan Harris, MPO Director Applicant

Charles Counsil, CAC Chair

Debbie Coudret

**OTHERS PARTICIPATING VIRTUALLY**

Bekie Leslie, MPO Administrative Services Coordinator

Wendy Scott, MPO Planner

##### **1. Call to Order & Roll Call**

MPO Chair Tiseo called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. The roll call was taken, and all members were present.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**3. Public Comments on Agenda Item**

There were no public comments.

**4. Interview of select applicants for MPO Director position – Discussion/Direction**

Each MPO Board Member had reviewed MPO Director applications, and two applicants were selected for interviews. MPO Chair Tiseo explained the interview ground rules. Applicants would be allowed to make an opening comment. Then, MPO Board Members would alternate asking a series of 10 questions with 3 minutes to answer each question. Chair Tiseo would keep track of the time for questions and responses. Applicant responses would be rated on a scale of 1-10. At the end of the interview, each applicant would have the opportunity to provide a closing statement. Each MPO Board Member would complete a scoring sheet for both applicants, and these would be tallied by Human Resources Director Heather Bacus. Commissioner Constance noted that it remained to be determined what action would be taken after the interviews. These were the two applicants interviewed:

* Joel Graeff
* D’Juan Harris

After the interviews, it was announced by Janette Knowlton that D’Juan Harris had received the highest score. Commissioner Constance was impressed by both applicants but gave the edge to D’Juan Harris who had extensive experience with FDOT and his knowledge of the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO. Commissioner Constance remarked that whenever Mr. Harris had been contacted for information while serving as FDOT’s MPO Liaison in Charlotte County, he was always extremely available. He felt that Mr. Harris’ management experience would develop rapidly and stated that he intended to make a motion regarding starting hiring negotiations with him.

Commissioner Deutsch declared that he would be seconding that motion.

Gary Harrell commented that Mr. Harris knew MPO staff well.

Commissioner Tiseo was glad that Mr. Harris had a four-week timeframe for commencing work with the MPO.

Mayor Mathews stated that Mr. Harris had directly answered all interview questions, which had impressed her very much.

Commissioner Deutsch noted that Mr. Harris’ salary request was found on his application. Commissioner Constance stated that he was comfortable with D’Juan Harris’ salary expectations and asked that they be considered in negotiations between him and Human Services Director Heather Bacus.

Janette Knowlton observed that his salary request was within the salary range. This target amount could be used by Heather Bacus when negotiating. Commissioner Constance suggested that it would be an appropriate amount. Janette Knowlton stated that the 4-week starting date would also be a goal during negotiations.

***Commissioner Constance*** *made a Motion to select* ***D’Juan Harris*** *as the potential MPO Director**and authorize Human Resources staff to negotiate a hiring package with Mr. Harris (to include his stated salary expectation and starting date) and then, return to the MPO Board at the next regular meeting to finalize approval.* ***Commissioner Deutsch*** *seconded the Motion, which was approved unanimously.*

**5. Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**6. Staff Comments**

Janette Knowlton congratulated the MPO Board Members on completing the MPO Director hiring process. Gary Harrell noted that the MPO Board couldn’t have picked a finer man. Betty-Ann Sherer stated she looked forward to working with the new MPO Director. Gary Harrell stated that the next MPO Board Meeting likely would be his last.

**7. Member Comments**

Commissioner Herston noted that although it had been hard to have an earlier MPO Director candidate decline the position, he was thrilled with the selection of D’Juan Harris, believing that his FDOT experience would pay off greatly. Mayor Matthews had been very impressed with Mr. Harris’ interview responses today that went beyond just paper credentials.

**8. Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:37 P.M. The next regularly scheduled meeting of the MPO Board will be held on Monday, October 18, 2021 at 2:00 p.m. at the Murdock Administration Center, 18500 Murdock Circle, Building B, Room #119, Port Charlotte, Florida.