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City of Gainesville Policy Program Preliminary Research & Analysis

TOPIC: Youth Advisory Board
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DATE: June 11, 2019
REQUESTED BY: Commissioner David Arreola

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Being that no Youth Advisory Board currently exists in the City of Gainesville for students in grade school to voice concerns and bring forth initiatives for allocating resources towards the younger populations in Gainesville's neighborhoods, it is recommended that Gainesville move forward with considering and eventually developing an ordinance for the adoption of a Youth Advisory Board. The majority of the boards researched are:

- Comprised primarily of high school students, while occasionally one or more adult seats are established as seen in Montgomery County, Maryland and Fort Myers, Florida.
- Tasked with making recommendations to the city commission on programs and initiatives relevant to the community's youth.
- Meant to foster greater civic involvement by youth in the community as well as increase government function awareness [i.e. the executive, legislative, and judicial functions].
- Intended to improve community outreach and create scholarship and tutoring opportunities for privileged and underprivileged youth, among other opportunities.
- Scheduled to meet once a month at the very least, with the exception of Fort Myers whose Board meets twice a month.

One major focus of the Youth Advisory Board in the City of Gainesville could be to amplify the existing support for an annual High School Teen Forum for youth and increase its scope of programs and speakers to best involve high school youth in civic matters, knowledge, and opportunities.

HISTORY/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Municipal Youth Councils are special citywide councils composed of students from different high schools or middle schools within the city. They typically serve as an advisory board to the city

commission/council and as a platform for youth of all backgrounds in their community. They are sometimes referred to as Youth Corps, Youth Advisory Councils, Teen Advisory Boards or Mayor's Youth Councils.¹

The City of Gainesville has already established a Student Community Relations Advisory Board to act as a vehicle for both college-age students and non-students in the community to voice concerns and develop initiatives to address the issues and needs of students in Gainesville. Then, such initiatives and concerns can be transformed into recommendations for the City Commission. This board sits under code enforcement division. It may be possible for a Youth Advisory Board to come into existence in the same area. The Student Community Relations Advisory Board could, in another case, be adjusted to include youth that are not yet in post-secondary institutions through the creation of a subcommittee, as was done in Boca Raton, Florida.

Recently, there have been initiatives such as the 2018 Gainesville High School Teen Forum for High School Youth which brought to the surface discussion about civic involvement and education. All the mayors from Alachua County were present and spoke before high school students from Gainesville. The students left the forum having a better idea of the role of local government, how they can get involved and why it's so important that they do. With the transfer of responsibility toward a Youth Advisory Board in Gainesville, there is grand potential for growth and improvement. Other activities such as round-table discussions, breakout sessions, debates, and collaborative group projects to get the students engaged will be helpful in encouraging the students to brainstorm and develop ideas that will be beneficial to them and their surrounding community.

A Youth Advisory Board in Gainesville can take inspiration from Orlando's effort and focus on community improvement by creating opportunities for underprivileged youth such as creating tutoring services and offering scholarships. Regardless, the Board should be active in seeking and partnering with local resources such as community leaders, local nonprofits and others who are interested in improving the quality of life for children and adolescents in Gainesville to best come up with recommendations for the City Commission and Mayor.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

This section highlights how other jurisdictions have approached this issue:

State of Florida

The following is an illustrative list of municipalities in Florida that actively support either a Youth Advisory Board or Youth Council Committee and structure it in a similar way:

- Alachua²
- Aventura³

¹ <https://www.flcities.com/resources/municipal-youth-councils>

² <http://www.cityofalachua.com/index.php/youth-advisory-council>

³ https://library.municode.com/fl/aventura/ordinances/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=819151

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- Cutler Bay⁴
- Dunedin⁵
- Hialeah⁶
- Niceville⁷
- Palm Bay⁸

All these Boards aim to provide the local Commission or Council with a perspective on the quality of life for younger populations, and ultimately establish a medium for civic involvement among students ranging from grades nine through twelve. For the listed cities, all members of such Boards shall:

- Report and make recommendations to the City Council on the needs, goals, objectives and results of activities relating to young persons in the community.
- Represent the City and its interests in any county, state or national initiatives, programs, boards and committees concerning young people.
- Promote sports, cultural activities and community projects for young people in the community.
- Educate young people on their civic duty and responsibilities to enhance the leadership skills and civic involvement among the community's youth.
- Educate young people concerning the function of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government as it pertains to young people and adults.
- Work to assist in planning and implementing various educational, civic, and community events to benefit youth in the community, and promote and recognize abilities, accomplishments and contributions of youth.
- Provide the youth a Forum through which to address their needs and concerns.
- Facilitate community meetings with youth to discuss issues and suggestions for improvement.

Most or all of the members must be enrolled in some form of education (such as a public school in the city, traditional homeschooling, or online with Florida Virtual School), be in grades nine through twelve, and not yet graduated high school. Or, the municipality has specified that members must be residents between the ages of fifteen to nineteen, or twenty-one in Hialeah. The members are, in most cases appointed by a Council Member and the mayor, as seen in Hialeah where each Councilmember may choose one member, or two per member in Cutler Bay. In Cutler Bay, there is a Town Council and local School District liaison which are not technically members of the committee. The number of members range from five to twelve, where Palm Bay's twelve members consist of three who are over thirty years old.

⁴ <http://cutlerbay-fl.gov/town-council/charter-officials/youth-council-advisory-committee>

⁵ <https://www.dunedingov.com/city-departments/city-clerk/boards-committees/youth>

⁶ <https://www.hialeahfl.gov/446/Youth-Advisory-Board>

⁷ <https://cityofniceville.org/282/Youth-Advisory-Council>

⁸ <https://www.palmbayflorida.org/government/departments/city-council-city-clerk/boards-committees/youth-advisory-board>

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Boca Raton, FL created a Community Advisory Panel for citizens to voice quality of life issues in the city, and several of its members who are high school and college students decided to start a Youth Subcommittee from that panel.⁹ Officially known as Boca Raton’s Community Advisory Panel Youth Subcommittee, they focus on youth concerns and initiatives and invite local students to participate in regular meetings. They also encourage student participation in local government activities.

Coral Gables, FL has established a Parks and Recreation Youth Advisory Board which is tasked with advising the City Commission as to the quality of life and recreational needs of the youth of the City. The Board is to assist in the planning, promotion, and implementation of programs and services for youth and teens of the City and foster a greater involvement of youth in city government and community service.¹⁰ The Board consists of seven members to be confirmed by the Commission, which each member of the Commission appointing one member, the City Manager appointing one member, and Board-as-a-Whole appointing one member. Members of the board must reside within the geographic boundary of the City of Coral Gables and be enrolled in grades in eight through twelve, in public, private, or home school.

Fort Myers, FL’s Teen Advisory Council members have duties which are to:¹¹

- Develop and promote programs that build strong character traits and skills teens will use into adulthood.
- Plan events that will educate and inform local teens.
- Support continuing dialog with all teens including private schooled and home-schooled students.
- Evaluate continuing feedback to ensure that all teen concerns are addressed justly.
- Ensure all information avenues are current.
- Advocate partnerships with existing and on-going teen programs and organizations.

The members should be a resident of the city between fifteen to nineteen years of age and maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.75 or equivalent. The Fort Myers Teen Advisory Council is not to exceed twenty-four members. Each City Council member shall nominate one member from each ward and the mayor shall nominate one member. The remaining seventeen members and the **adult chair** shall be appointed by the selection committee, consisting of a member of each of the following groups as compiled by the Fort Myers Youth Services Coalition:

- Faith-based agency member
- Government-funded agency member
- Local non-profit organization member

Homestead, FL runs its youth effort slightly different by actually having a Mayor’s Youth Council that is meant to complement academic studies by increasing the students’ knowledge, voice, communication, and involving them in practical hands on experiences to promote volunteerism

⁹ <https://www.myboca.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=512>

¹⁰ <https://coralgables.granicus.com/boards/w/a2d677a566a5fce0/boards/7046>

¹¹ <https://www.cityftmyers.com/264/Teen-Advisory-Council>

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among both youth and adults in civic education and affairs.¹² Its members are students in grades eight through eleven who live in the City of Homestead.

Miramar, FL has a Teen Council Advisory Board whose purpose is to research, review, plan and recommend to the Director of Parks and Recreation the establishment of social and recreational programs to be made available to the teenage youth of Miramar. The Board has a total of nine members who are all high school students that are appointed by elected officials.¹³

Orlando, FL has a Youth Advisory Board in its District 5.¹⁴ The District 5 Youth Advisory board has twenty members who set out to represent a cross section of unprivileged and privileged youth from public and private school systems to enhance community outreach, expand career exploration, and update career preparation. The primary responsibilities include fundraising, marketing, media relations, coordination of district events/ service projects, and youth peer mentoring. They also work to provide

- Scholarship Opportunities
- Career Explorations
- High School Senior Year Assistance
- Peer Mentoring and Tutoring.
- Internships and Job Shadowing
- Job Opportunities
- Community Service

Palmetto Bay, FL has a Youth Community Involvement Board whose members are to make recommendations to the Council on how best to engage youth in local government and are tasked with the following duties:¹⁵

- Advise the Village Council as to the quality of life and recreational needs of the youth of the Village.
- Assist in the planning, promotion and implementation of programs and services for youth and teens of the Village.
- Foster a greater involvement of youth and teens in municipal government and community service. Participate in Village events such as the village picnic, Earth Week, and sponsored events including, but not limited to Relay for Life, and other events as determined to be appropriate.

The Board is comprised of eleven students (ages twenty-one or under) who reside within Palmetto Bay, or are home-schooled or whom attend public, or private schools within the municipal limits of Palmetto Bay.

¹² <https://www.cityofhomestead.com/350/Mayors-Youth-Council>

¹³ <https://www.miramarfl.gov/450/Teen-Council-Advisory-Board>

¹⁴ <http://www.cityoforlando.net/district05/yab/>

¹⁵ <https://www.palmettobay-fl.gov/432/Youth-Community-Involvement-Board>

Elsewhere in the United States

Montgomery County, Maryland has a Commission on Children and Youth¹⁶ of twenty-seven members comprised of youth, parents, and child-serving professionals that aim to:

- identify the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them,
- inform and advise the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE) and the community at large,
- Recommend policies, programs, funding and legislative priorities,
- Affirm the needs, aspirations and achievements of all the County’s young people,
- Advise the County Executive and County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Board of Education on the development of coordinated community and government policies, programs and services which support children, youth and families, and
- Provide effective public information on children’s programs and services in the County.

Savannah, Georgia has the Savannah Youth Council whose mission is to provide local youth with the experience of working with city government while obtaining a sense of civic responsibility as well as the opportunity to develop and demonstrate leadership skills. The council is composed of a diverse group of 8th grade students who learn and actively participate in our local government, work together on group projects, demonstrate leadership and participate in community service activities.¹⁷

Other Examples (from academia, think tanks, and other sectors)

Miami’s Children’s Trust

The Children’s Trust Youth Advisory Committee¹⁸ (YAC), open to all Miami-Dade County high school students, is a youth leadership program designed to nurture the next generation of change-makers committed to positive change in themselves, their communities and the world. Through regular meetings, advocacy trainings and firsthand service-learning experiences, YAC-ers spend the academic year in an exploration of leadership and advocacy. Approximately 60 youth are currently participating through six branches, which simultaneously help students to meet requirements for high school community service hours.

Big Thought

Big Thought is an organization which seeks to bridge the gap between the right opportunities and kids who need them most by adapting programs and working in partnership with other organizations. Big Thought has recently started its own Youth Advisory Council in which members will be connected with other board members, volunteers, organization advocates and other teens in order to lend their voice towards shaping the out-of-school programming agenda for their

¹⁶ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/CYF/CCY/CCYmain.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.savannahga.gov/562/Savannah-Youth-Council>

¹⁸ <https://www.thechildrenstrust.org/content/youth-advisory-committee>

community.¹⁹ Council members will also be given the chance to volunteer through many community based summer programs across the city as well as volunteering with Big Thought throughout the year. Meanwhile, Big Thought has tasked the Council with the goal of finding:

- What is relevant for young people?
- What do they need to succeed in school or in a future career?
- How do they see themselves making a difference in their life or in the world?

In order to support their voice in the community,

- The Youth Advisory Council members will be assigned to Program Committee members, based on their assigned program. Youth Advisory Council members can shadow assigned Program Committee or staff members to committee meetings and staff to site level work.
- Based on the type of programming, the committee member will determine the best way to receive feedback from their assigned Youth Advisory Council member(s) (i.e. site visits, survey, and meetings, digital or online).
- YAC members will have an opportunity to meet the entire Program Committee and Program staff.

UMHS

The University of Michigan Health System has found it beneficial to incorporate a Youth Advisory Council into their school-based health centers. They have developed an entire manual²⁰ with the goal of assisting others in the development of a YAC, and have suggested some of the following tips:

- “It is ideal for YACs to be youth-led, which means that youth members are involved in all aspects of planning and implementation of the program”.
- “To be successful a YAC should be Youth-led, have consistent, structured meetings, practice community building, offer a safe space for students (youth) to come and just be, and focus on planning, implementing, and reflecting on meaningful projects”.

Youth Forums

Across the US, Youth Boards take it upon themselves to host forums which provide a space for in-depth conversations on topics that are relevant in both local and national contexts. The Gainesville Youth Advisory Board could aim to support the annual High School Teen Forum, and can learn from what other groups have already done. For instance, the Huntington (NY) Youth Council hosted a two-hour Youth Forum this year for high school students to have an open discussion on Political Correctness, Student Mental Health and other topics as they come up in a public portion of the forum.²¹ Central Arizona College, meanwhile, has hosted a five-hour Youth Matters Forum which invited over 100 young people and addressed a more broad range of issues including Bullying, Domestic Violence, and Substance Abuse.²² The Dauphin County (PA) Children and Youth Forum included a panel of county representatives who gave updates and fielded questions before an audience of youth from the community. Additionally, a number of community agencies and

¹⁹ <https://www.bigthought.org/get-involved/youth-advisory-council/>

²⁰ <https://www.umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/manual-for-website.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.huntingtonny.gov/youthforum>

²² <https://centralaz.edu/event/youth-matters-forum/>

resources were provided to the attendees, giving them an awareness of the clubs and nonprofits in the community working to improve outreach and independence for adolescents in Dauphin County.²³

One great option for the layout of a Forum can be seen with what the Madison County (IL) Youth Forum on Teen Mental Health did; there were various breakout sessions during the day for students to discuss possible stress management solutions. In each session there was at least one member from the Madison County Youth Board to facilitate and moderate the discussion. Afterwards, the recommendations were presented to a panel of community leaders and policy makers who were present at the forum.²⁴

A roundtable discussion and debate can also provide the opportunity for attendees to not only discuss issues in a smaller setting but also to socialize and get participants to meet one another while establishing lasting connections. A Roundtable for African Youth in New York City²⁵ did just that and found it to result in a positive outcome. Similarly, the City of Columbia (SC) Police Department held a Young Ambassadors for Justice Roundtable in which high school students spoke directly with members of the department's command leadership staff on youth-related topics such as personal safety, youth violence, relationship issues and current events.²⁶ A smaller roundtable more focused on the local government at hand can be seen with Hire LA's Youth, a group intended to help local youth find employment opportunities,²⁷ Mayor's Roundtable. This was a more intimate roundtable discussion that took place in the Mayor's Press Conference Room and consisted of only a dozen Hire LA's Youth participants wherein topics discussed included mental health issues, mentoring programs, and socio-economic challenges.²⁸

Putnam County, Florida, recently held a Youth Forum hosted by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Putnam County's 4-H Youth Development Program and the Putnam County Youth Bureau, in partnership with the Putnam School District. The Forum was set up as a day-long educational program organized by and designed for Putnam County High School Students to attend various workshops facilitated by professionals on issues such as healthy lifestyles & eating disorders, internet and technology, law and order in the community, how to survive college, and teen addictions.²⁹ What seemed to help the event reach an attendance of over 150 students was that each of the participating schools provided transportation to and from the event. The planning committee for this event consisted of more than just the Putnam County Youth Bureau and invited other high school students to get involved and help plan the topics, programs and help facilitate and moderate the event while it is taking place.

²³ <https://www.valleyyouthhouse.org/vyh-youth-speak-at-dauphin-county-children-youth-forum/>

²⁴ <https://www.siue.edu/news/2017/10/Madison-County-Youth-Forum-at-SIUE-to-Discuss-Teen-Mental-Health.shtml>

²⁵ <https://theafricanjournalonline.com/roundtable-for-african-youth-in-new-york-city-it-was-a-time-to-discuss-issues-answer-questions-and-socialize/>

²⁶ <https://columbiapd.net/young-ambassadors/>

²⁷ <http://www.hirelayouth.com/intro.html>

²⁸ <http://ewddlacity.com/index.php/press/news-2/594-ewdd-fills-nine-out-of-12-slots-at-mayor-s-hire-la-s-youth-roundtable>

²⁹ <http://putnam.cce.cornell.edu/events/2018/01/16/putnam-county-youth-forum-planning-committee>

Having a Youth Board in place in Gainesville can be a catalyst for making sure the event not only occurs but leaves a lasting mark on students in the community as well as elected officials in the region who need to hear the concerns and well-developed recommendations of Gainesville Youth.

PRELIMINARY COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Potential Costs:

- Administrative costs associated with structuring, recruiting, and overseeing the board and its events.

Potential Benefits:

- Increased engagement among youth.
- Improved opportunities for insight into the challenges faced by Gainesville’s young people, and a way to leverage their assistance in addressing them.

PRELIMINARY AND ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Alachua County Public Schools
- The Children’s Trust

RECOMMENDED POINTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH/DISCUSSION

- None identified at this stage

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIZATION SCORE (BASED ON ATTACHED WORKSHEET)

- To be completed

PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR FURTHER ACTION

- If desired, may be presented at the next available General Policy Committee for further discussion and framing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES