

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2015

SERVING SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE

Jim Murley likes to say this state is a dress rehearsal for the rest of the country and South Florida, in particular, is great place to identify issues the entire US is going to be looking at.

We have the largest proportion of people over 65, along with a young and diversified population; an income gap in our regional community that must be narrowed or – better yet – closed; and a need to better prepare for what are forecasted changes in sea level rise. Other states might not be facing these issues right now but many will have to, so that's the dress rehearsal, Mr. Murley said.

As executive director of the South Florida Regional Planning Council, he pays close attention to long-term challenges and opportunities facing this part of the state, overseeing the council's assistance to the region's leaders in developing and implementing creative strategies for more prosperous and equitable communities, a healthier and cleaner environment and a more vibrant economy.

That's a tall order. It means keeping an eye on employment opportunities, transportation initiatives and improvements, water supply planning, and the creation of sustainable, livable communities, among other endeavors.

A small regional agency can't solve address all these issues alone, Mr. Murley said, so it partners with counties and cities, the private and nonprofit sectors as well as regional, state and federal agencies.

Mr. Murley said the important thing for the regional council, especially urban South Florida where we have large county governments and millions of people who live here, is to work across layers of government and look for ways they can work together and be more

THE ACHIEVER



Jim Murley

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Age: 69

Born: Cleveland

Education: Bachelor's, history, political science, Denison University; Juris Doctor, George Washington University.

Personal Philosophy: I love the Latin term *carpe diem*; for me, it means each day gives you a new chance at life, and whatever regrets you have from the past, you can look forward.

effective.

Miami Today reporter Susan Danseyar interviewed Mr. Murley in Coconut Grove.

Q: Did you ever practice law?

A: A little bit, but most of my career has been in government and nonprofit institutions.

Q: How long have you been executive director of the South Florida Regional Planning Council?

A: About four years. There was a short time where I was hired by Jack Osterholt to become director of a new project the council was undertaking. In a month or two, he was asked to become deputy mayor of Miami-Dade County, so he left and suggested to the council that I replace him.

Q: What are your duties?

A: I'm the head staff person. The council hires two people: myself and its general counsel, attorney Sam Goren, so all the other employees I'm responsible for and I hire.

We're involved in planning as well as small business support and climate change, along with other things. We are not a large agency – probably 15 people, smaller than what we were in the past as a lot of government shrunk as we went through the recession and other pressures. We do a lot of partnering with our county and city governments and private not-for-profits.

Q: How is the council funded?

A: Our base funding comes from membership dues from the three counties. Then we get grants and other revenues.

Q: What are the long-term challenges and opportunities facing Southeast Florida?

A: We have a lot of opportunities. We are a crossroads of Central and Latin America with the widening of the Panama Canal and expect trade and movement of goods and people

Jim Murley leads regional planning council in broad focus...

from the Far East increasingly.

The airports and the ports that make up South Florida are key to our future. Being able to move goods and have access to the capitals around the world are investments from the public standpoint that are very important and need to be coordinated with a lot of private players. So the Regional Planning Council works with a host of transportation planning agencies.

A very diverse population has been absorbed into our community. Sometimes that presents challenges but, in the long run, it's a great asset and that's what is attracting new business and investment. People come here willing to accept vast diversity and welcome visitors, tourists, part-time and ultimately full-time residents and citizens.

Q: Your mission statement claims the council provides creative strategies to help develop and implement long-term opportunities. What are some examples?

A: Our economy is made up of a lot of small businesses and they produce a lot of the jobs. A large number of small businesses just starting up might not have the history or credit rating to immediately get conventional financing. So our council set up a revolving loan fund for small businesses. It has been very successful and provides one point of access for startup capital or expansion of small businesses throughout our region.

We're looking to expand that. As the loans are paid back, we can return those funds back into new loans.

The one pre-requirement to come talk to us about funding is you have to be turned down by a conventional bank. We're trying to help folks just below that threshold so they can get above the threshold and then deal with commercial banks.

Q: What kind of assistance does the council provide to the region's leaders?

A: We're providing special portions of our bi-monthly council meetings where we discuss regional topics, assistance on regional conferences for a host of subjects.

Regional leaders are part of the council. There are county commissioners appointed by Monroe, Miami-Dade and



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

Executive Director Jim Murley helps the South Florida Regional Planning Council to partner with counties and cities, business and nonprofits, state and federal agencies.

Broward counties, city elected officials appointed by the leagues of cities in those counties, and one-third of our council is appointed by the city and governor at the time a vacancy occurs.

So we have elected officials and private sector representatives who, while they live and work and reside in our region, are appointed by the governor and they're there to articulate state interests.

Q: What are examples of Southeast Florida having achieved more prosperous and equitable communities?

A: One of our biggest regional challenges is an income gap. We have people who are fortunate to have very high incomes and a high number of people living in poverty. A small regional agency cannot solve a problem of that magnitude alone. It's another example of why we collaborate with agencies set up to address that issue.

We have career source agencies and have worked with the economic development entities – the Beacon Council and the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance – on training and preparing people for the new jobs.

A typical low- or moderate-income family making \$20,000-\$30,000 has to pay for housing, transportation and all the other things out of that small amount. It goes back to whether we can provide choices in transportation for a lot of residents, workers in the service

industry especially, that will allow them to minimize their transportation cost, if we're addressing housing issues as much as we can with the private sector. If you can manage rent or your mortgage and transportation costs, then you have more disposable income for health benefits, education, taking care of your family.

We need to do as much as we can to give people a range of choices and reduce those costs. Then we're helping them in a more equitable way from a public policy standpoint and giving them the broadest way to have disposable income to improve their education and advance into the middle class.

Q: Do you have optimism about narrowing, closing the income gap?

A: I think we can do it by identifying it as a real issue and taking responsibility for it as a collection of governments and also the private sector recognizing that while they're creating great wealth, they need the service economy to maintain that.

It's not a bunch of robots. It's a bunch of real people who have to get to work, take care of their families, so if we want to keep the golden egg, we've got to tend to all the details. That is one of the major things we need to look at. It's not a simple issue. Government can't solve a problem but government can certainly be a player in that solution.

Q: Is the council focused on climate

...targeting transportation, water supply, livable communities

change and rising sea levels?

A: We have been in the last four or five years.

Florida is a peninsula surrounded by water and it is very flat. On top of that, our geographic location puts us in the tropics. If you talk about vulnerability to the climate, by definition that vulnerability has existed for eons and it exists every year as we hit hurricane season.

Hurricanes are weather phenomena that today, because of TV and satellites, we can literally see in real time leaving the coast of Africa and heading towards us.

We may see high tide events that are more severe than they've been in the past and we may see flooded events from intense rain, which is now and may be more intense in the future, but we're talking about these events that we can visualize because we've had experience with them.

We need to talk about sea level rise differently because sea level rise is not an event. Sea level rise is the impact of the warming of the oceans. Over the last 100 years we have measured empirically at Key West 9 to 11 inches of actual sea level rise. It's happened over thousands of years.

What we're concerned about is we have expanded dramatically the amount of carbon dioxide that we're emitting from power plants, from cars. The vast majority of scientists are telling us that the phenomenon of putting more CO₂ back into the atmosphere is causing an accelerated warming.

We can do things in our region and we're very lucky our counties have taken the lead and recognized as national leaders. When President Obama was here for Environment Day and at Everglades National Park, he mentioned the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact. That's the three counties of our region plus Palm Beach, which is in a separate region, coming together to address these questions and challenges and help themselves adapt.

That's a very important word in our vocabulary – adaptation – and thinking about how we develop and redevelop so that we may be better prepared for what may be unknowns but what are forecasted changes in the sea level rise.

Q: What information do we need to protect against these challenges?

A: We need to improve the forecast for what might happen over what timeframes. The compact is pulling together a group of professionals from the region – scientists at the universities, scientists who work for our national weather service – and they're asking them to look at the data that's coming nationally and internationally and do their best to give their projection of sea level rise out to at least 50 years.

That's not something that science and the data today allow you to say, what sea level rise will be in 2046. It ends up being scenarios. There's a low scenario range that it might be, medium and high, with different assumptions for each. That allows people to look at the data from these experts and try to make the best possible decision that they won't regret later.

Q: One year into Amendment 1, where do we stand?

A: It was a very important vote and citizens' initiative on the ballot last November. Seventy-five percent of the people voted for the amendment that provides for land acquisition.

The amendment clearly said for the next 20 years, one-third of the revenue from documentary sales tax would be allocated to the purposes of Amendment 1. The proponents felt that that should be primarily toward land acquisition, buying more land that could be protect us from sea level rise or provide habitat for wildlife or protect wild fields so that you don't have to regulate them from development.

The Legislature's session was very complicated: they had to make the first year out of 20 decision about how to allocate about \$740 million, which represented one-third of the doc stamps revenue collected this year.

From the perspective of the proponents of the amendment, not nearly enough was allocated toward land acquisition. Much more was used for other purposes that are in the amendment and are certainly eligible. But, for example, salaries of state employees that were paid for by other revenue sources were switched so that they were paid for by Amendment 1. That's eligi-

ble under Amendment 1 if those state employees are dealing with land acquisition or restoration, but it appears that there might have been a broader sense.

It depends on your point of view, like every big public policy decision, on how the funding should be spent. We had one year. We have 19 more years. Each year, we have to make a decision and need to build consensus in the region among our counties, business community and environmental organizations and communicate that to our state legislators so they have a better idea how that money could be spent.

That's important because it's a statewide program and there are certainly issues around the state that deserve to be funded. Our region is probably providing half of those revenues. I'm not proposing it's a dollar for a dollar, but for South Florida, where we have the development and where we're generating the revenues for the entire state, there's an equitable return that can be used in our region because we have a lot of needs.

Q: How do South Florida's challenges and opportunities compare with other parts of the state and country?

A: We like to say that Florida is a dress rehearsal for the rest of the country. South Florida is great place to identify issues that the rest of the country is going to be looking at.

We have the largest proportion of people over 65. The baby boomers are a huge demographic group moving to the point where they're working longer than we would have expected. We're going to hopefully live longer and have a vast system from social security, Medicare and private insurance that has to take care of the boomers.

We then have a young population. I think there are 40 languages in the Miami-Dade schools so it's very diverse, and many of the other issues we've talked about are imbedded in the region and the state.

About 75% of the country's population lives within 75 miles of the coast and these large urban areas that are coastal are very much going to look like South Florida. They might not look like it today but that's where they're headed, so that's the dress rehearsal.

Q: Tell me about your past roles in government.

A: I've been very lucky and able to serve almost in every level of government at the Regional Planning Council. I've served at the state university system, the Florida Atlantic University.

I lived in Tallahassee. My last post was secretary to the Department of Community Affairs for Gov. Lawton Chiles.

When I was in Tallahassee, I was honored to be the first executive director of 1,000 Friends of Florida, which was a not-for-profit created to watch over Florida's growth and also its housing issues.

I served in the federal government. I worked about eight years in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and traveled all over the country working on coastal problems.

Q: Is there anything else about the

council you want readers to know?

A: The important thing for our regional council, especially urban South Florida where we have large county governments and millions of people who live here, is to work across layers of government and look for ways they can work together and be more efficient and effective. There are many issues that require that.

Recently, a large megamall has been proposed in Northwest Miami-Dade County up near Miami Lakes. It is a long process ahead, but Miami-Dade County recognized that whatever decision the county commission makes with the mayor, they needed to know what was going to be the impact of those decisions on Broward County, Miramar and Miami Lakes. Those are independent local governments that wouldn't be making the decision but might feel very strongly about what was going to hap-

pen, so they've asked the regional planning council to act as a convener and bring together the affected parties and other experts and work with the developer.

The decision will lie with Miami-Dade County, but the information that they'll consider, because of the council being evolved, will be much broader than the standard zoning decision that might be made, because this is a very big project and it deserves to be understood in a regional context.

Q: What do you do to relax?

A: I love to bicycle and I love to hike when I have a chance. I'm very fortunate to have a 13-year-old daughter in the Miami-Dade school system, so I focus a lot on her and my wife. We live in Shenandoah, a historic neighborhood in the city of Miami, which we really enjoy, very accessible to everything.

