

Hillsborough County Aviation Authority
Special Board Meeting

Tuesday, 9:00 a.m.
November 12, 2024

A Special Board Meeting was convened in the Boardroom, Level 4 of SkyCenter ONE, Tampa, Florida, on Tuesday, November 12, 2024.

Members present were: Chairman Diehl, Gary Harrod, Robert Watkins, Mayor Castor, and Commissioner Cohen.

Aviation Authority staff members present were CEO Joe Lopano, Scott Knight, Veronica Cintron, Violet Cummins, Michael Kamprath, Emily Nipps, Michael Stephens, John Tiliacos, Beau Zimmer, Carol Marino, Officer Lopez, Officer Mason and Angelo Mottola.

Chairman Diehl welcomed everyone to the Special Board Meeting of the Aviation Authority. He asked that anyone who would like to comment on propositions before the Board see Violet Cummins for a form.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Chairman Diehl then asked for a Motion to Approve the Agenda.

Upon motion of Gary Harrod, seconded by Commissioner Cohen, the Agenda was unanimously approved by all Board Members present.

Chairman Diehl proceeded Public Comments.

Michael Reeves was the first speaker. He congratulated outgoing CEO Joe Lopano for his leadership and acknowledged the airport's strengths. He expressed concerns about the lack of African-American representation in leadership roles within the region, emphasizing the need for inclusivity in future selections to reflect the community's diversity.

Roberto Torres spoke next. An immigrant and business owner, he highlighted the importance of continuity in the vision established by Joe Lopano. He advocated for a CEO who can enhance the Airport's role as a conduit for economic development and foster collaboration within the Tampa Bay region.

Joseph Robinson was the last public speaker. He is a consulting engineer who thanked Mr. Lopano for his service and pointed out the lack of diversity on the Tampa International Airport Board. He urged the Board to consider community representation in their decision-making process.

Chairman Diehl asked if there were any additions or corrections to the Special Board Meeting held on October 30, 2024.

Upon motion of Commissioner Cohen, seconded by Gary Harrod, the Minutes of the Special Board Meeting held on October 30, 2024 were unanimously approved by all Board Members present.

Chairman Diehl introduced outgoing CEO Joe Lopano, who expressed gratitude for the team's hard work and reflected on his 13 years of leadership. Mr. Lopano acknowledged the challenges of the transition but emphasized the opportunities ahead for the Airport and confidence in the new CEO's ability to continue driving success.

Chairman Diehl commended Mr. Lopano as a visionary leader and highlighted the Airport's significance to the community. The meeting then shifted focus to the CEO selection process, with Michael Bell from Korn Ferry outlining that two finalists, Michael Stephens and John Tiliacos, who would present their vision for the airport. The finalists were not given specific guidelines for their presentations, allowing them to share what they deemed essential for the Board's consideration. After the presentations, the Board would discuss and vote on their preferred candidate.

Michael Stephens first addressed the Board as a candidate for the next CEO of Tampa International Airport.

Mr. Stephens shared his personal background. He spoke of his commitment to building on Mr. Lopano's legacy and emphasized the importance of innovation, collaboration, and enhancing the passenger experience.

He outlined his vision for the Airport's future, focusing on the need for proactive solutions to address anticipated growth and challenges, particularly regarding regional transportation connectivity. Mr. Stephens stressed the significance of teamwork and employee engagement, asserting that the Airport's success relies on a strong, united team. He concluded by expressing his readiness to lead the Airport into a promising future, emphasizing a focus on both immediate operational details and long-term strategic goals.

The Board Members each had individual questions for Mr. Stephens.

John Tiliacos next addressed the Board as a candidate for the CEO position at Tampa International Airport. He expressed gratitude for the confidence placed in him during the selection process.

Mr. Tiliacos emphasized that safety and security are his top priorities for the airport, along with maintaining its status as a world-class facility. He outlined his commitment to innovation, economic growth, and fiscal responsibility. He highlighted the importance of addressing transportation challenges in the region, particularly as Tampa's population is expected to grow significantly over the next 20 years.

He also discussed the necessity of collaboration with community leaders and stakeholders to enhance air service opportunities and improve regional connectivity. Mr. Tiliacos shared his extensive experience in the aviation industry and his proven track record in leading teams and driving successful initiatives.

Mr. Tiliacos expressed eagerness to continue the legacy of the previous CEO, Joe Lopano, and lead the airport into a successful future. Mr. Tiliacos answered questions from the Board regarding his vision for the Airport.

Scott Knight discussed the voting process. Pre-made ballots would be passed out, the Board Member's choice of candidate would be circled and the Board Member would sign their name. Mr. Knight and Elita McMillon would review the ballots and Mr. Knight would announce the results.

Mayor Castor expressed that the decision regarding the next CEO of Tampa International Airport was challenging due to the impressive qualifications of both candidates. She praised Mr. Tiliacos for his leadership skills, understanding of operations, and strong work ethic, stating he effectively gets the job done. However, she highlighted a key difference between the two candidates: Michael Stephens presented a vision focused on the future growth of the Airport and its integration with the wider Tampa Bay region, particularly in relation to transportation systems. Mayor Castor emphasized the need for innovative leadership to advance the Airport's role as a crucial asset for regional development.

Gary Harrod expressed his agreement with the Mayor's vision for future growth of the Tampa Bay area, pointing out the Airport's significant influence on the community's development. He acknowledged the strengths of Mr. Tiliacos, who excels in operations, but highlighted Michael's broader vision for growth. Mr. Harrod believed that simply expanding local facilities to accommodate more passengers won't fully benefit the region and that Mr. Stephen's leadership would be advantageous for the entire Tampa Bay community.

Commissioner Cohen agreed with the Mayor, noting that both candidates were capable but underscoring the importance of having strong leadership to address transportation issues. He expressed support for Michael Stephens, citing his forward-thinking approach and ability to drive progress.

Robert Watkins presented a contrasting view, asserting that while both candidates have strong visions, he favored Mr. Tiliacos for his extensive experience and operational competence. He stressed

the importance of having a CEO who understands the pressing transportation challenges facing the Airport and the region.

Chairman Diehl acknowledged the quality of both candidates and emphasized the need to keep the team together during the transition.

The Board Members then voted and Scott Knight announced the voting results. Michael Stephens received four votes in favor (from Commissioner Cohen, Mr. Harrod, Mayor Castor, and Chairman Diehl), while John Tiliacos received one vote (from Mr. Watkins), resulting in a 4-1 decision in favor of Mr. Stephens.

Michael Stephens was asked to come back to the Boardroom.

Michael Stephens expressed his gratitude at being selected as the new CEO of Tampa International Airport. Mr. Stephens emphasized his commitment to the organization and the community, sharing his excitement for the future. He conveyed his eagerness to collaborate with the Board and the team as they move forward together.

Michael Bell outlined the process for contract negotiations and the transition plan, emphasizing the importance of preparing an employment offer for Mr. Stephens and determining the timeline for Mr. Lopano's departure. Mr. Watkins shared that the new CEO should officially take over only after Mr. Lopano's Contract ends on April 5, stating that having two CEOs would create confusion.

Gary Harrod advocated for a smooth transition while recognizing the need to discuss compensation for Mr. Stephens and ensure Mr. Lopano's continued involvement as needed. The Board discussed the necessity of a transition plan, and Mr. Lopano agreed, acknowledging the potential challenges of having two leaders during the transition.

Chairman Diehl agreed with the need for a transition plan and mentioned the importance of recognizing Joe Lopano's legacy while facilitating Mr. Stephen's entry as CEO. Mr. Watkins clarified that he never suggested cutting Mr. Lopano's Contract short.

Commissioner Cohen made a motion, seconded by Mayor Castor, to have Korn Ferry work with Chairman Diehl to negotiate a contract with Michael Stephens and to bring a transition plan back to the Board for approval. This was unanimously approved by all Board Members present.

With no further business to be brought before the Board, Chairman Diehl adjourned the meeting.



Arthur F. Diehl III, Chairman



Jane Castor, Secretary

BARRY COWEN, ASST SECRETARY