

April 20, 2025

Board of County Commissioners
Palm Beach County
301 N. Olive Avenue
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Letter of Intent – Palm Beach County Administrator Recruitment

Mayor Marino, Vice Mayor Baxter, Commissioner Flores, Commissioner Powell,
Commissioner Sachs, Commissioner Weiss, and Commissioner Woodward:

Please accept this letter of intent and attached resume as my application for the position of County Administrator for Palm Beach County. While my resume outlines my experience and qualifications, I am highlighting key points relevant to this specific position to assist in navigating the resume.

As a graduate of the University of Florida (BA, economics) and the University of South Florida (MPA), I have key educational credentials. Beyond the MPA, I was given the opportunity to be an adjunct instructor in the USF MPA program – teaching both Public Financial Administration, and State and Local Budgeting. Both degrees are highly relevant to this position.

I have lengthy, relevant experience in a large, Florida county – Hillsborough County (Tampa). My roles included not only substantial direct support to the County Commissioners, but I also worked with each of the Constitutional Officers, the Circuit and County Courts, every department, each city, local and regional authorities, and several State agencies. Palm Beach County offers an incredible opportunity for your next County Administrator. Few candidates can hit the ground running using similar large Florida County experience but a fresh look at the organization and the issues it faces.

At the level of senior management or above, I have 32 years' experience, of which 25 was in Florida. At the executive level, I have over 12 years' experience. I have overseen the 9th fastest growing county in the nation, and my experience as both a county manager and as a city manager gives me perspective on inter-government issues from both sides of the table. We need not only for the County to be successful under your next County Administrator, but the cities and other local entities to be successful as well. To that point, I have served on the executive committee of both a county chamber of commerce, and a county United Way.

I applaud Mrs. Baker's recognition for achieving Aaa/AAA/AAA bond ratings for Palm Beach County. I have had similar success (and it takes a team to achieve it) in two counties – Hillsborough County, FL and Forsyth County, GA. The highest bond ratings directly lower costs to the community we serve. When my county issued \$100 million in bonds, we sold them at a true interest cost (TIC) of 0.95% -- less than one percent.

With a total of 33 years' county experience, I have represented the Florida Association of Counties on three projects, involving the Florida Department of Revenue, the

Department of Community Affairs, and the Governor's Office. I served on the National Association of Counties' finance committee, chaired the Government Finance Officers Association of the U.S. and Canada (GFOA) Budget and Management Committee, and served on the GFOA Executive Board. I worked on behalf of state and local governments for more than a decade in negotiating with key corporate representatives how Internet taxation can work for both government and business. At the same time, I taught budget and financial management seminars for 20 years and spoke at dozens of state, regional and national conferences. I would like to believe you will not find a stronger financial candidate for this position. Financial skills are critical for success at this level: negotiating economic development opportunities with developers that is critical to moving the community forward, ensuring we minimize our cost of borrowing in conjunction with the Clerk and Comptroller, fine-tuning our cost of doing business in the budget process to hold down taxes, and navigating how we pay for storm damage -- or Presidential protection. I think one example, specific to Palm Beach County, may help: Accounting standards require we disclose what the cost is for benefits we give our employees -- particularly when much of that cost is paid years later. In Hillsborough County, I took on our "other post-employment benefits (OPEB)" liability for retiree health care head-on. We managed what had been a hidden cost and reduced our unfunded liability. I did the same in Forsyth County, Georgia, and in the City of Norcross. In Norcross, the unfunded liability is one-half what it was when I was hired four years ago -- and will continue to drop. Why is this relevant to Palm Beach County? Because the most recent audit shows the County has an unfunded liability of \$280 million -- most for Sheriff's employees. As the Board of County Commissions, you and your successors will have to levy the taxes and other revenues necessary to meet those obligations. It is worth developing a strategy now to contain and reduce those unfunded liabilities because the annual cost paid for retirees will accelerate in future years if we do not.

I know that as the County faces a variety of challenges moving forward, that you need a visionary who can use the institutional knowledge of the organization Mrs. Baker leaves, and apply new perspectives to guide County Commissioners in making strategic policy decisions. I have had the opportunity to take my Hillsborough experience and apply them in both a county and a city to drive economic growth and expedite processes. In Forsyth County, I dedicated a direct report to the County Manager to fast-track key development -- testing the concept on a 135-acre mixed use development (Halcyon Forsyth) combining residential, retail, office, and hotel development, with connectivity through a 26-mile greenway spanning three jurisdictions. For economic development, we adopted an ordinance that gave me the ability to offer developers incentives with subsequent ratification by the County Commission. It works when the incentives and what it takes to qualify for them are pre-defined by the BOCC. Facing rapid growth, we restructured our process for building and widening roads, and I collaborated directly with the Georgia Commissioner over GDOT (the equivalent of FDOT's Secretary) on prioritizing funding for state and local roads.

Coming out of the Great Recession, I developed a new strategic plan for Hillsborough that recognized that a focus on rebuilding the business sector would stimulate the nonprofit sector and give government the revenue needed to address our challenges. The plan considered local issues within the context of the broader region. Whether on the east

coast or the west coast, in Florida, we are interdependent on other counties within the region.

I later headed a community-wide discussion of transportation where we navigated how to address urban, suburban, and rural needs through more than five dozen meetings spread throughout the county – while briefing each mayor and each county commissioner monthly to keep them current on the discussion. A referendum was later passed.

As a county manager and city manager, I have been tested in assembling a team that can address current challenges. I look forward to sharing examples of strategic, but unique, hiring processes for key positions.

Finally, as we spur economic growth, we face challenges in providing affordable housing opportunities. I had the unexpected opportunity in Hillsborough County to take the lead on the County's programs on a day-to-day basis while overseeing other departments and programs. In Norcross, we supported an unusual number of successful federally funded developments for a city of our size: three 9 percent tax credit awards in two years.

I set high expectations for ethics and performance. I let my frustration get the better of me a few years ago. More recently, I withdrew from consideration for a county administrator opportunity in southeast Florida where I did not sense a good fit after the interview process concluded. Why is this important to share? I learn from my mistakes and, with a three-year contract at Norcross that has been extended out another four years, an interview process with Palm Beach County would be two-sided. I would come to Palm Beach County having determined it is in our mutual best interests. My job as your County Administrator is to use all the resources provided to me to ensure each of you is successful as you serve together as the Board of County Commissioners. At this point in my career, I seek to use my experience to materially help a community move forward.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet each of you, and to participate in an open forum or open house to introduce myself to the County organization and the community. I can be reached at (██████████), or eric.johnson.tampa.fl@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

/s/

Eric R. Johnson

Eric R. Johnson

([REDACTED]) – eric.johnson.tampa.fl@gmail.com

Summary

Thirty-two years' senior management experience in local government – primarily, urban Florida county government – including managing the ninth fastest growing county in the United States. Twelve years' experience as a county/city manager or assistant county administrator. Highly experienced speaker and trainer, serving on behalf of the Florida Association of Counties on State of Florida task forces while also serving on national task forces on behalf of local governments, and on the National Association of Counties finance committee. Initiated economic development tools including a "fast pass" process to expedite priority projects. Led major cross-jurisdictional projects and negotiated complex contracts. Led dozens of community meetings as input to key policymaking decisions. Cut millage rates numerous times to aid taxpayers and business. Degrees in economics (BA, University of Florida) and public administration (MPA, University of South Florida).

City Manager, City of Norcross, GA 10/20 – present

Developed strategies for use of federal funding – Cares Act, ARPA, and FEMA reimbursements.

Initiated citywide infrastructure upgrades in stormwater and transportation to address years of neglected major maintenance with a plan to upgrade or replace all stormwater pipes within three years and resurface all roads within 10 years.

Implemented the City's first comprehensive salary study, supported two affordable residential developments that received a total of three 9% federal tax credits through statewide competition, and retained designation as a Platinum level sustainable community through the Atlanta Regional Commission. Successfully replaced several key senior positions in a period of the "Great Resignation." Initiated process improvements, addressed the need for front-facing bilingual positions, began a conversion to hybrid and electric vehicles, and implemented a millage reduction. Managed an electric utility, stormwater utility, and solid waste utility. Shrank an unfunded liability for retiree health in half, and it will continue to phase down.

County Manager, Forsyth County (Cumming, GA) 9/2017 – 9/2020

Led the fastest growing county in Georgia (and the 9th fastest growing county in the United States since 2010) with a population of 254,000. Initiated measures to protect employees and customers in the face of the Covid pandemic. Successfully passed a countywide referendum on a local option sales tax after holding a series of community meetings.

Restructured the process to accelerate delivery of transportation projects after consultation with utilities, architects, construction companies, and the Georgia DOT. Upgraded infrastructure standards to reflect rising community expectations and introduced incentives to completing road projects. These required successful negotiations with the largest roadbuilder in the state, and one of the largest engineering firms in the world. Worked directly with the head of the Georgia Department of Transportation (equivalent to the Florida Secretary of Transportation) on joint funding of road and interchange projects.

Expedited economic development projects – and others – by creating “fast-pass” position within Planning, and another reporting directly to the County Manager with authority to cross department lines and resolve process issues. Proof of concept was expediting a 135-acre mixed-use development already in development – Halcyon Forsyth – involving retail, apartments, hotels, office space, townhomes, and single-family houses.

Moody's and S&P reconfirmed the County's stable Aaa/AAA bond ratings in 2019, and the County secured its first rating from Fitch Ratings – a stable AAA on water and sewer bonds – to join the elite group of AAA/AAA/Aaa governments. Issued the County's first bonds through a competitive process, resulting in a true interest cost (TIC) of 0.95% for \$100 million in sales tax-backed bonds. Issued \$170 million in utility bonds for water and wastewater expansion and to refinance existing utility debt.

Initiated incentives for cross-training and certifications in several departments to broaden employees' skills and productivity – a concept borrowed from Manatee County years ago – and to improve customer service. Implemented a new pay structure based on a comprehensive study of area governments -- addressing “pay compression” issues that had remained after earlier studies and set ranges at the 65th percentile to become a preferred employer.

Updated the County fleet and facilities and implemented technology projects – all targeted to improve employee productivity. Funding for these areas had languished since the recession.

Assistant County Administrator, Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 2015 – 2017

Hillsborough County served a population of 1.4 million, of whom 900,000 lived in unincorporated areas for which the County served as the municipal service provider, with an all-funds budget of \$3 billion.

As the lead on a cross-organizational transportation initiative, led 64 community meetings throughout three cities and the unincorporated areas while managing monthly briefings with each county commissioner and each mayor, and coordinating with two city managers and a chief of staff.

Transformed the Human Resources Department structure to better achieve success in attracting and retaining County employees in a more competitive market. Headed off accelerating costs in the \$80 million self-funded employee health care program while shoring up reserves that had been drained: instituted plan changes, increased contributions, and drove down costs through wellness initiatives that are broad in terms of participation -- but focused on where the organization can best manage costs while improving employees' and their dependents' quality of life.

Reduced the County's unfunded liability for current and future retiree health benefits – an issue that had languished while the liability grew.

Initiated formal grants management policies and procedures across all County departments consistent with new federal requirements, and covering more than \$80 million in state and federal grants. Successfully competed for new grants including a Homeland Security grant for a fire boat used primarily to serve boaters on Tampa Bay.

Tasked as Interim Director of Affordable Housing Services for seven months while maintaining all other responsibilities as Assistant County Administrator, managing a \$30 million program. Gained additional community development expertise in housing issues, particularly with non-profit developers, and in the use of federal tax credits to incentivize investments without local funds.

Director of Strategic Planning and ERP Implementation, Hillsborough County 2011 – 2015

Tasked with two substantial cross-organizational/cross-jurisdictional initiatives – development of a new County strategic plan in the aftermath of the Great Recession, and a joint technology project with the City of Tampa that reflected the largest IT project in the County's history – a \$34 million 5-year joint investment that, based on vendor pricing, saved Hillsborough County \$4.4 million, and the City of Tampa \$2.2 million.

Strategic planning involved close work with county commissioners, city mayors, the business community, local government agencies including the Tampa/Hillsborough Aviation Authority, Hillsborough Area Regional Transit, the Tampa Port Authority, the Sports Authority, the University of South Florida, and other regional leaders and citizens. It incorporated the County's first use of crowdsourcing technology for public engagement. The resulting plan reflected a heavy emphasis on economic development, recognizing that a strong economy not only benefits business, but also government and non-profits. A key takeaway was how to assist development projects by working with developers with a sense of urgency, which I also implemented in Forsyth County.

Initiated a grants management office and assumed oversight for a criminal justice unit. A greater focus on recovering overhead costs from grants yielded an added \$1.4 million in recurring annual revenue to the General Fund. New federal funding was obtained to support criminal justice diversion programs to reduce the Sheriff's inmate population and reduce recidivism. The process for applying for regional water management grants in support of stormwater management was centralized to ensure prioritization of projects, and to increase the potential for successful award of funding.

Management Services Administrator (assistant county administrator), Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 2008 – 2011

Served in the capacity of assistant county administrator directing employees in seven departments: Administrative Services, Management and Budget, Human Resources, Procurement Services, Information and Technology Services, Fleet Management, and Consumer Protection. Simultaneously served as Director of Management and Budget daily due to budget cuts.

Implemented substantial spending cuts due to Florida tax reform measures (\$43 million) and, one year later, due to the Great Recession (\$95 million). The variety and sophistication of cuts reflected use of a zero-base budget process coupled with a comprehensive set of financial policies. Minimized layoffs through aggressive placement of employees while cutting 1,150 positions – a 17.4% reduction in positions. Built reserves while creating "war chests" to ensure funding availability for two Board-identified priority areas: economic development (\$18.5 million) and affordable housing (\$6 million). Non-recurring savings were used to defease debt -- freeing up a portion of the County's recurring non-ad valorem revenues to sustain recurring operations in the aftermath of the recession.

Procurement received the highest national recognition from NIGP – the Pareto Award for Excellence. Fleet received national recognition from *Fleet Management Magazine* for the nation's best government fleet – twice. Received the County's first AAA bond rating from S&P, subsequently followed by similar ratings from Fitch Ratings, and Moody's. Appointed by the Florida Association of Counties to represent counties in an oversight committee formed by the State of Florida to address potential investment losses of state and local funds by the State Board of Administration because of investment in mortgage-backed securities.

Initiated a joint ERP project with the Clerk of Court and the City of Tampa to manage costs to replace outdated equipment and software.

Director of Management and Budget, Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 1993 – 2008

Developed budgets in excess of \$3 billion using a zero-base budget process to allow priority budgeting. Implemented the first biennial budget process in Florida and assisted other Florida governments switch to a biennial cycle. Facilitated a series of millage rate reductions that improved the county's bond ratings while mitigating a portion of the impact of increasing property values on taxes. While Save Our Homes helps homestead property owners, only millage reductions assist other taxpayers.

Built reserves and maintained multi-year financial forecasts – all oriented towards the County subsequently obtaining AAA/AAA/Aaa bond ratings. Received the highest recognition in government finance, the GFOA *Award for Excellence*, for creating the *Taxpayer's Guide to the Hillsborough County Budget* – which became a model for jurisdictions communicating with residents and businesses. Implemented cost reduction strategies, performance management, and a fleet replacement funding strategy that improved the quality of the County's fleet, reduced downtime and maintenance costs, and shrank the fleet size. Instituted random audits of performance metrics to ensure proper documentation of performance.

Served as a reviewer for GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award Program and taught national GFOA seminars on budgeting, performance measurement, service level evaluation, and revenue analysis. Appointed to state committees to oversee development of fiscal impact models for use by local governments, and to create a comprehensive communications services tax for local governments. Represented GFOA on the State and Local Advisory Committee to the Streamlined Sales Tax Project (collection of state and local sales taxes on remote Internet sales).

Education at Florida Universities

- **BA in Economics**, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
- **MPA**, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (Served as adjunct faculty member after graduation, teaching two courses in the MPA program at USF.)

Recognition

- Picot B. Floyd Public Service Award, American Society for Public Administration Suncoast Chapter
- Achievement Award, National Association of Counties
- Award for Excellence, Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA).
- GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, with Special Performance Measures Recognition and Special Capital Recognition
- Diversified Workforce Achievement Award, Hillsborough County
- Breakthrough Award, United Way of Forsyth County

Service

- Executive Board, Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA).
- Chair, GFOA Budget and Management Committee
- Executive Committee, and Board of Directors, Forsyth County, GA Chamber of Commerce
- Executive Committee, and Board of Directors, United Way of Forsyth County, GA