

Cultural Resources Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

8:30 AM | APRIL 12, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

On April 12th, 2023, the Cultural Resources Branch meeting convened at 8:32 AM with the following members present:

- Janel Trull (on behalf of Gloria Tate)
- Matt Johnson
- Teresa Watkins Brown
- Mike Flanders
- Lydia Black
- Anna Lazzizzera (on behalf of Sylento Anderson)

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Terry Mazany, Collaboratory
- Harrison Newton, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Branch members introduced themselves. Terry Mazany, the Branch facilitator, began the presentation.

Recovery Task Force (RTF) Updates and Problem-Solving Process

Mr. Mazany provided a review of the RTF and Branches in the recovery and resilience planning process and provided a review of the unmet needs committee and the separate group. Robert Heere provided a review of the work of the RTF since the last meeting, including the community engagement plan priorities and information regarding the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program.

Research and Data Presentation and Discussion

Harrison Newton presented the key challenges and findings for the three Branch identified priorities regarding Cultural Resources.

Priority 1 Key Challenges and Findings

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges of the first priority: Short-term recovery and stabilization of the arts.

The total burden of cultural resources losses over time is currently unknown. Mr. Newton reviewed the findings and public and private grants that could assist in recovery. Branch members discussed the following:

- Context that some organizations were denied in the process and funding streams for FEMA and other federal funds. This has made recovering difficult.
- Capital funding was discussed. There is a survey for cultural facilities and sustainable funding efforts and planning.

Priority 2 Key Challenges

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges of the second priority: Convening of the arts community supporting cultural facilities and individual artists. Branch members went on to discuss the following:

- COVID hurt maintenance and put improvement processes on hold, which developed into “survival and recovery mode” when the hurricane hit. There are issues with available capital.
- Fort Myers focuses on the arts more than other communities in the county.
 - For example, branding of the Tourist Development Council (TDC) highlights Fort Myers as the entire area, so people do not come to Lee County, they come to Fort Myers.
- Having funding sources and connections are needed as a huge step forward.
 - There is difficulty obtaining funding because the arts are in survival mode. Without big fundraisers, they are behind and still trying to get back to normal.
 - Since Hurricane Irma, there has been a lag of three years for federal funding. Cultural facilities became conservative on repairs in the wait for the reimbursement period. There is a need to get a local reserve and funding source that helps with the gap of the funding reimbursement period. The biggest need for direction for cultural resources is assistance between funding reimbursement and program creation.

- There is a need for sustainable funding and reserves for six months. If another disaster comes, it will be dire for cultural resources.
- The Lee County Black Historical Society shutdown prevented outreach.
 - There is no funding coming in and a lack of capital to sustain for three months. They partnered with the school district and colleges.
- Exhaustion of leadership and donors due to the string of disasters. Providing health and wellness to volunteers and leaders is needed.
- Cultural resources are not thought of as economic or emergency management.
 - However, cultural facilities were used for distribution and relief without compensation.

Priority 2 Key Findings

Mr. Newton discussed finding best practices for communities that use funding streams in a different way. There was also the impact of staff not having housing and the challenges that emerged from that. The Branch members discussed:

- Getting access to other funding sources and not just arts and culture funding routes.
- Due to cultural facilities existing on city land, they are at the will of the city and closed their properties during emergencies due to requirements.
- Discussed how to reposition the sector to be aligned with funding:
 - Government connection versus private entities and the differences
 - Historical sites and avenues of funding and protection of sites
 - A wider variety of qualifications of historical sites and changes in the last ten years
- Two organizations that provide grants to individual artists were identified:
 - Fort Myers and Arts Alliance
 - Indianapolis has grant opportunity for artists

Priority 3 Key Challenges

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges of the third priority: Regional cultural planning and county-level representation for the arts. Branch members discussed:

- Researching what other cities have done and recommendations from lessons learned.
 - Examples exist post-Hurricane Irma in Miami Dade.
- Facility needs and workforce funding for organizations.
- Discussed being able to claim loss on tax forms for post-disaster losses.
- Discussed connecting community conversations to the organization and making a long-term impact in the arts community.

Priority 3 Key Findings

Mr. Newton provided information on the Small Business Administration (SBA) and FEMA. Branch members discussed if Hurricane Ian can be used to reposition arts and culture in the hearts and minds of Lee County. Other cities have programs, but what will it take to integrate arts into the fabric of the community here?

Next Steps

The schedule of meetings was shared with the Branch members.

Discussion and Questions

Mr. Mazany reminded the Cultural Resources Branch of the November meeting plan and the December 5th, 2023 meeting date.

Ms. Black asked about the need for a Cultural Resources Branch Chair and what that would entail. Appointment will be made at the next Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) meeting.

Public Comment

Liz Bellow-Mathews with the City of Fort Myers commented that Fort Myers serves as the gateway to the region and is in the process of creating a strategic plan. She would like to understand how this Branch is going to drive and how different areas are going to interact. The city started evaluating what was needed and investing further in Arts and Culture. They decided to split the departments. Arts and Culture is now included in the Public Affairs Department. This year in the fall they intend to present it to their city council. She also wanted to highlight the non-profits and arts organizations that played a vital role in response and emergency management.

Chief Tracy McMillion with Fort Myers Fire Department commented that the emergency management teams thanked the non-profit sector for allowing them to utilize spaces for emergencies and locations and will work to plan for communicating their use.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Mazany thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 9:35 AM on April 12th, 2023.