

Economic Recovery Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

3:00 – 4:30 PM | MAY 18, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100,
FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

On May 18, 2023, Dominic Cameratta, Co-Lead of the Economic Recovery Branch convened the meeting at 3:05 PM. The following members were present:

Branch Members:

- Dominic Cameratta, Co-Lead
- Jay Johnson
- Donna Germain
- Ben Spence
- Tim Abbott
- Kevin Barbot
- Jim Magnus
- Ben Siegel
- Jonathan Gabel
- Steven Weathers
- Kyle Morgan
- Shane Spring
- Bill Johnson, Jr.

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Tessa LeSage, Collaboratory
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Ilani Fernandes, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Mr. Camaretta gave welcoming remarks and began member introductions. Tessa LeSage, the Economic Recovery Branch facilitator, reviewed the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and Branch structure and encouraged the Branch to think big. She emphasized that one of the Branches' tools is identifying emergent issues and bringing them to the RTF for resolution. Ms. LeSage reviewed the timeline of the RTF, emphasizing that the Branch is moving toward the development phase of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Plan). Ms. LeSage informed the Branch that the only vote they will make is to approve the Branch Action Plan.

Ms. LeSage encouraged Branch members to participate in other Branch meetings as a member of the public and noted that transportation issues have consistently come up in other branches and during community engagement events.

Ms. LeSage noted the purpose of the meeting is to determine if initial community engagement feedback aligns with Branch priorities, review the initiative development framework, and validate the design of the workshops.

Recovery Task Force (RTF) Updates

Jon Romine provided a review of the RTF meeting held on April 28, 2023. Mr. Romine summarized the RTF meeting which focused on a discussion of capital improvement projects (CIP), emergent issues, a conversation on resiliency, and next steps for members.

Mr. Romine stated that CIP priorities that emerged were septic-sewer conversions, hardening water infrastructure, hardening power infrastructure, the hardening infrastructure of schools, and special needs populations.

Emergent issues that were highlighted during the RTF meeting included the backlog of the permitting process and the closure of SalusCare. In response, the ResilientLee support staff is creating a permitting dashboard and a case study from Bay County that can be referenced during the planning process around behavioral healthcare. Additionally, SalusCare reopened earlier in the week. Mr. Romine encouraged members to attend the Recovery Task Force Meeting on May 26th to find out more information.

Community Feedback

Ms. LeSage reviewed the community engagement process, noting that there have been several Town Halls thus far, with more scheduled. Ms. LeSage reviewed initial survey feedback from the ResilientLee.com survey, noting the top priorities that were identified by

respondents. These topics identified include housing and homelessness, economic development, environmental issues, crime, violence, public safety, and parks and recreation.

Members asked if the Chambers of Commerce were engaged to share the community survey. Ms. LeSage confirmed they were included in the outreach.

Ms. LeSage reviewed the initial Town Hall feedback from members of the community, highlighting the priorities that were identified such as awareness of storm gentrification, affordable housing, transportation near employment hubs, river communities feeling overlooked, focus on manufacturing instead of tourism, affordable K-12 after school tutoring, efficient insurance payouts through regulation, contractor pledge to finish in a timely manner, low interest, no red tape loans for small businesses, and diversification of industry, training, and trades. The data also presented feedback on what was needed for community families to be successful, the results included: livable wages, economic diversity, improving Old Downtown, safer infrastructure to lower insurance rates, financial assistance to help businesses hire, local officials that are not on multiple boards, short-term marketing efforts to bring tourism back, light industry and manufacturing, and fisheries infrastructure.

Mr. Moran asked how to regard the significance of the community input with the survey data. Ms. LeSage stated that this was an opportunity to think about the larger picture.

Ms. LeSage reviewed initial feedback from On The Table, an event held on March 30, 2023, highlighting the top 10 issues identified (i.e., housing and homelessness, mental health and substance abuse, healthcare access and cost, K-12 education, well-paying jobs and economic development, hunger and food insecurity, environmental issues, public transportation and traffic, early childhood development, and generational poverty).

The members were asked how the community feedback aligns with the Branch priorities. The members agreed that life skills and soft skills were missing from the community feedback, starting with K-12 and how that translates to the workforce.

Members asked how much action should be taken as the survey priorities change. Ms. LeSage stated that themes are emerging, but some are consistent across the board. Ms. LeSage asked the Branch to think about the best things that can be done to advance the resiliency of the economy.

Members agreed that many of the Branch priorities and themes have overlapped with the Town Hall feedback. Mr. Spring spoke on a recent visit to Washington D.C.'s transit system and encouraged looking into consulting firms or other ways to make transportation more efficient. Mr. Cameratta stated that it's important to continue to invest in what's working.

Members stated high commute times are a loss in productivity and lowering those commute times by adding public transportation options would be a huge success for the economic future of the area. Members stated that the Infrastructure Branch should investigate solutions for transportation and traffic issues, and Ms. LeSage verified that it would be communicated to the Branch.

Mr. Moran asked how the Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) worked with this framework. Ms. LeSage stated that it was one avenue for funding, but the Branch should not be concerned with funding and to think big.

Initiative Design

Mr. Romine also encouraged the Branch to think big about the opportunities that the Plan can address. He reviewed the purpose and approach of the Action Plan that the Branch will develop. The purpose is for the Branches to develop Action Plans as an initial step in framing identified and approved initiatives. The Action Plan will: provide a prioritization framework for existing plans and projects; illustrate the planned approach for new initiatives; and identify key policy changes that can support community resilience. The three buckets that the Branch will be focused on when developing the initiative are projects, prioritization, and policies.

Mr. Romine identified the responsibilities of the Branch members during this process, emphasizing that Branches are responsible for facilitating the design (concept and approach) of the initiatives and identifying a lead to facilitate initiative implementation. Branches will need to identify the lead, initiative description and progress, measures of success, and partners.

Mr. Romine reviewed the special nature of the Planning & Capacity Branch, which is in the process of developing a resilience overlay. He noted the purpose of the overlay is to identify and address potential risks and hazards in a specific geographic area or to a set of plans and communicate priorities across planning processes and budget development. Mr. Romine explained that overlays often identify and visualize potential risk areas in advance to reduce disaster impacts. The Economic Recovery Branch should provide the Planning & Capacity Branch with the policy recommendations that need to be included in the overlay.

Workshop Design

Ms. LeSage began the discussion about the purpose of the workshops, highlighting the themes, topics, and subject matter experts (SMEs) requested. The topics include Attainable

and Resilient Housing; Critical Infrastructure; Community Resilience; and Supporting Business and Workforce.

Ms. LeSage encouraged the members to think about workshops and what initiatives could look like. She also stated that members can attend any workshop as themes and topics intersect across Branches. Mr. Romine stated that Workshops will be taking place June 6-9 and encouraged members to attend as many sessions as they'd like to.

For Attainable Housing, Mr. Spring suggested that someone who is familiar with the Live Local Act, Senate Bill 102, be included in the workshop. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were suggested as subject matter experts as well.

Mr. Spring suggested that the arts and culture in Sarasota County be taken into consideration. Mr. Spring asked about the marketing industry and to think, "why should we come to Lee County?" Mr. Johnson said that the Visitor and Convention Bureau's marketing plan includes multiple stages. Mr. Johnson also asked if there was a commitment between the County and municipalities in this process. Mr. Spring stated that there is a collaborative effort working to bring them together within the next year. Mr. Romine encouraged the Branch to consider the region-wide policies that could be included in the Plan.

Mr. Barbot stated the Sanibel Causeway toll is hurting the tourism-based recovery of the businesses on the island that are still struggling post-Hurricane Ian. The members agreed to identify this as an emergent issue to bring to the RTF. They identified a potential solution of providing toll relief for those that utilize the Sanibel Causeway by either removing or lowering the toll to \$2 for the summer season or through December 2023.

He shared his interest in CDBG-DR and how to make the most with immediate input without losing people that have been the backbone of this County. Mr. Romine spoke about the Unmet Needs Recovery Group to make sure Members are aware of the direct service availabilities.

Next Steps

Ms. LeSage asked the Branch to send their workshop suggestions, subject matter experts, and initiatives to info@resilientlee.org. Ms. LeSage said that the next Branch meeting is scheduled for June 15th, 2023, from 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM.

Discussion and Questions

Mr. Abbott asked what the desired outcome would be from the workshops. Ms. LeSage stated that it was to help provide a scope of the issues that have been put forward.

Mr. Cameratta suggested bringing a list of what restaurants are open on Sanibel. Mr. Spring said that the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber provides a weekly list of what is reopening for visitors.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer commented that when addressing the workforce, it's important to look at credential companies to make sure that local businesses are provided with the resources to be successful.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 4:30 PM.