

Health & Social Services Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

3:00 PM- 4:30 PM | MAY 9, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100,
FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 3:01 PM on May 9th, 2023, Jon Romine, the Branch facilitator, convened the Health & Social Services Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- Jeannine Joy
- Stefanie Ink- Edwards
- Maria Espinoza
- Angela Katz
- David Brown
- Dawn Belamarich
- Therese Everly
- Lorri Philbin (on behalf of Julie Ferguson)
- Dana Begley
- Tom Felke
- Jorge Quiñonez
- Greg Dewitt
- Nicole Calderone

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Harrison Newton, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Jaesa Rogers, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Branch members introduced themselves. Jon Romine provided an overview of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) structure and the Branches structure. He emphasized the priority

of the Branches: to identify emergent issues and bring them to the RTF to resolve. Mr. Romine reviewed the timeline for the RTF, emphasizing that the Branch is moving towards the action phase of the plan. Mr. Romine told the Branch that the only vote they will make is to approve the priorities of the Branch in December.

Recovery Task Force (RTF) Updates

Mr. Romine provided an update on the work of the RTF over the last month. He provided a review of the timeline of the Recovery and Resiliency Planning process. He noted the purpose of the meeting (i.e., determine if initial community engagement feedback aligns with Branch priorities; review initiative development framework; and review and validate workshop design). Mr. Newton reviewed the RTF meeting in April including the discussion of capital improvement projects, emergent issues, and the conversation about resiliency. The emergent issues discussed at the RTF meeting included the reopening of the regional behavioral healthcare provider, SalusCare, previously discussed in the Health & Social Services Branch.

Community Feedback

Mr. Romine reviewed the community engagement process, noting that there have been 11 Town Halls so far, with more coming up. He reviewed initial survey feedback from the ResilientLee.com website, noting top priorities that have emerged (i.e., housing and homelessness, environmental issues, crime, violence, and public safety, mental health, and hunger and food insecurity).

Mr. Romine reviewed initial Town Hall feedback from members of the community, highlighting the priorities that have emerged (i.e., facilities for foster kids, including therapeutic group homes; downpayment assistance for LMI populations; singular location to assess minor medical issues for short-term post storm impacts; resources for local Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs); accurate pre-storm information for sheltering to local media; space needed in shelters for children with autism and mental health diagnosis; and the need for physical voting places in each precinct).

Members were asked if the priorities align with the priorities outlined by the Branch.

Ms. Everly said that there needs to be an emphasis on special needs and vulnerable populations. She brought up conversations that occurred in the Housing branch meeting earlier in the day, and pointed out that the Housing branch wants to emphasize homeless services, which ties into this branch.

Ms. Belamarich said that there must be recommendations for access in a crisis in addition to access while not in a crisis. Mr. Newton noted that the prevalence of mental health concerns and issues normally will increase after a disaster. Ms. Belamarich said there is not enough access before a disaster, let alone after.

Ms. Everly noted the Housing branch conversation around seniors, emphasizing that the age of homelessness is increasing in Lee County. She brought up the Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), which is a small medical-waiver program. She said there is an opportunity to partner with the Housing committee to scale this program and work with developers to increase housing opportunities and care for the elderly populations.

Mr. Romine said that analysis of the community feedback results will be shared with the whole Branch.

Initiative Design

Mr. Newton 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. Newton identified the responsibilities of the Branch members during this process, emphasizing that Branches are responsible for facilitating the design (i.e., 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. Newton 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. Newton explained that overlays often identify and visualize potential risk areas in advance to reduce disaster impacts.

The Health & Social Services Branch should provide the Planning & Capacity Branch the policy recommendations that need to be included in the overlay.

Ms. Everly brought up Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping of 211 calls that have already been done, and asked Ms. Joy and Mr. Felke to speak more about that. Ms. Joy said United Way provided 211 call data to Mr. Felke's team at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), who mapped that data on top of population and demographic data to get a sense of what Lee County looked like during Hurricane Ian. Ms. Joy clarified that 211 is the number community members can call to find information on access to services. It was utilized as a storm hotline during the hurricane. Mr. Romine asked the Branch members involved in that process to think about how that map could inform policy recommendations. He then encouraged Branch members to continue attending other Branch meetings.

Mr. Dewitt asked who would take the lead when working with other Branches. Mr. Romine said some leads already exist, giving the example of Fire Chiefs taking the lead of emergency management topics.

Ms. Belamarich asked, "How do we go about figuring out what capacity we have today?" She said a foundational step needs to be identifying what resources Lee County has. Mr. Newton responded, saying that some of this information has been researched, but the RTF support team will investigate it further. However, he noted that identifying all this information would take a year to complete. Mr. Romine noted that Lee Health is investigating what behavioral health services are available.

Ms. Espinoza asked if there is a map of wrap-around services (i.e., a map of what was asked for and what organizations responded). Mr. Romine brought up the unmet needs long-term recovery group, which could inform the wrap-around process, noting that those two pieces of work have not yet been combined but will need to be.

Ms. Belamarich asked if one of the goals of this group is to build a hub that could provide as a crisis response center. Mr. Romine said a resilience hub might be one of the initiatives that this group decides to push forward. Mr. Romine emphasized that there needs to be specific buckets of priorities, as opposed to a wide range that is not feasible.

Mr. Dewitt asked what the number of initiatives should be. Mr. Romine said that is up to the Branch to decide, however 3-5 per Branch would end up being ~50 initiatives, which is still a lot. He noted that the Branch initiatives will overlap with each other and can be combined. He emphasized the importance of making a plan that is implementable.

Ms. Begley asked if social issues that would exist outside of a disaster are able to be addressed. Mr. Romine said yes. He explained that a resilient community has resilient plans in place whether there is a disaster or not.

Mr. Newton said there may be discreet and tactical actions that are impactful, as well as high-level transformational actions.

Ms. Everly said it is much easier to count housing inventory as opposed to health and human services resources. She echoed Ms. Belamarich's earlier point that there is no hub to identify all health and human services in the county. Mr. Romine said this may be an initiative for the Branch to focus on.

Ms. Everly said there could be a database that identifies all health and human service resources, and where they are. Ms. Belamarich said that it could also identify which organizations are online or offline during a storm. Ms. Espinoza brought up that giving each non-profit organization (NPO) or human service provider a network that could gather information like that would be extremely helpful during a crisis. Ms. Joy said that was the original intention of the 211 hotline and that it worked like that during Irma, but the scale of Ian was so massive it was more difficult to do that this time. She said that during Irma organizations would call 211 to report whether they were online or not, so there is kind of a structure in place, but this institutional knowledge gets lost when she must train new people every day. Mr. Romine said this sounds like a couple of initiatives that are bubbling up and encouraged Branch members to email the ResilientLee email with these ideas.

Workshop Design

Mr. Romine began the discussion with 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. Everly said family health centers, Lee Health, and the health department should be key players involved in long-term community resilience for vulnerable populations. Ms. Edwards noted the topic in the community resilience workshop "How can Lee County ensure vulnerable populations have care before, during and after a disaster?" She said it should be separated into healthcare and human services care. The Branch agreed, and Mr. Dewitt said there needs to be an emphasis on short-term versus long-term as well.

Ms. Everly said SalusCare needs to be a SME at the Community Resilience workshop. Mr. Quiñonez said that mental health is a long-term issue and needs to be thought of in that way. Ms. Katz said that "special needs" must be defined at a county level. Ms. Espinoza asked if "vulnerable populations" definition will be the same definition that the unmet needs committee is using. Mr. Quiñonez said there are theoretical plans that Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has in place, but concrete plans need to be put in

place as well. Ms. Everly said there are connections within the county with national pharmacies, and those coordination processes in place must be codified. Ms. Edwards said that food and hunger-related organizations would be happy to be a part of that conversation as well. Mr. Dewitt said that there are two major pharmacies in the state of Florida that are used. Mr. Newton encouraged the Branch members to think about these processes so that they can be solidified during the Community Resilience workshop.

Ms. Joy said there is one hub that is hardened, and there are other hubs that work as satellite hubs but are not hardened. Mr. Romine concluded the discussion by encouraging the Branch members to email their initial ideas of initiatives to the ResilientLee email.

Next Steps

Mr. Romine said that the next Branch meeting would be Tuesday, June 6th, 2023 from 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm, unless there is a workshop in its place.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer commented immigrants need to be included into the definition of vulnerable populations; and food and nutrition should be considered.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 4:28 PM.