

Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | FEBRUARY 27, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

On February 27, 2023, Commissioner Kevin Ruane convened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. with the following members present: Councilmember Chris Corrie, Mayor John Gunter, Mayor Katy Errington, Mayor Kevin B. Anderson, Mayor Dan Allers, Mayor Holly Smith, School Board Chair Armor Persons, Lee County Property Appraiser Matt Caldwell, Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka, Undersheriff John Holloway, Chief Robert Dilallo, and Board Member David Collins.

2. Welcome to the Recovery Task Force, Commissioner Kevin Ruane, Chair

Chair Ruane opened the meeting by thanking the members of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) for being present and participating in the meeting. He stated that Hurricane Ian (Hurricane) was the third most costly hurricane in history. Of the disasters, there was one thing in common, a Task Force, therefore it was imperative that Lee County follow suit. He stated that although there were many different issues in the County, there were also many commonalities. Chair Ruane thanked Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka for her assistance and advocacy in Tallahassee.

Chair Ruane stated that this was a financial recovery and one that has many branches to it. He stressed the need to advocate together so that businesses, residents, and other individuals can work in unison and maximize the recovery efforts. He expressed the need to advocate for tax credits for people who have experienced the different parts of the recovery process. Chair Ruane thanked Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for helping to build bridges for Sanibel Island and Pine Island quickly so that residents could receive relief. He then thanked Hagerty Consulting (Hagerty) and the Collaboratory for providing assistance and indicating potential revenue streams to maximize the recovery for different cities. Chair Ruane stated that there is an opportunity for collaboration; the public has a responsibility,

and Members have an obligation to the public to be transparent. He said there will be openness with the public and continued advocacy for the community. He said that this was a financial recovery for businesses, nonprofits, individuals, hospitals, and others impacted by the Hurricane. Chair Ruane said this was a long-term task, but he felt there was not a better group of people to work with than those in the room.

Chair Ruane thanked the Board County Commissioners for selecting him as the Chair of this Task Force.

3. Introductions

Task Force Members went around the room introducing themselves.

4. Presentation:

Chair Ruane recognized facilitators Terry Mazany, Chief Collaboration Officer with Collaboratory and Tanya Shannon, Deputy Director of Recovery with Hagerty Consulting, to conduct the presentation.

Review of Charge and Roles for the Recovery Task Force and Branches

Mr. Mazany presented an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Recovery Task Force. He stated that each Member was leading recovery efforts for their constituents. Each person is encouraged to participate in person at all RTF meetings to review initial priorities, identify and propose Branch Members, provide feedback on the Branch findings, and ratify the final planning documents. Each Branch will consist of 8-10 government, nonprofit, and private sector stakeholders and subject matter experts (SME). Nominations will be conducted using an online submission form and nominees will be made aware of the 5–10-hour commitment. Each individual selected would be chosen based on qualifications that can support each Branch. The nominations will be presented at the next meeting of the Board of County Commissioners on March 7, 2023. Branch meetings would start following the County Commissioner’s meeting from March 13-24, 2023.

Mr. Mazany stated that the Branches are modeled after the National Disaster framework. Branches will be meeting more frequently to address emergent needs that will come before the Task Force. This would be a time for Members to interface with the community to develop viable, feasible, and desirable action solutions.

Phases, Timeline, and Milestones

Chair Ruane recognized Ms. Shannon to present an overview of the phases, timeline, and milestones for the work conducted by Task Force. Ms. Shannon shared the timeline for the calendar year and stated that the October meeting would be an opportunity for the Members to provide feedback and circulate within their jurisdiction so they can present a finalized plan in December to the Board of County Commissioners.

Ms. Shannon stated that a unified voice is imperative when advocating to state and federal leaders, along with a regular presence in Tallahassee to ensure Hurricane Ian recovery is at the forefront of legislature priorities. She stated that the Mid-Term Phase would include articulating the efforts to the public. This would involve revisiting lessons learned and creating a vision of resilience recovery using base research and data. Ms. Shannon said that an outline will show the overall process, actionable targets, and milestone plans that show the progress and funding streams tied to it. This document would be a living document that is regularly updated and referenced.

Plans for Initial Community Engagement

Ms. Shannon presented the plans for initial community engagement. She announced that the resilientlee.org website has been launched. Videos, notices, meeting minutes and agendas would be added to the website for transparency with the community.

Mr. Mazany stated that the Collaboratory had organized a day for civic dialogue last year in October, but it was postponed due to Hurricane Ian. Rescheduled for March 30, 2023, the goal of the On the Table sessions is to reengage the community in structured conversations around mealtimes. Each Member was provided a host kit to help guide what the process would look like. Mr. Mazany stated that Florida Gulf Coast University created a survey to help anonymously collect information about citizens according to their zip code.

Mr. Mazany then explained each of the Branches and their capacity. Each Branch was tasked to review unmet needs and issues, create community engagement strategies to make the County more resilient, engage stakeholders and subject matter experts, find potential solutions and innovative ideas, pick key data points and existing plans that should be considered, and identify local, state, and federal policies to be reviewed. Chair Ruane then opened the floor up for discussion.

5. RTF Member Discussion

Ms. Smith raised a point about Branch Members that may have already been identified by the Task Force. Chair Ruane stated that a running list would be sent to members following the meeting. Chair Ruane stressed that there was a lot of work to do. Departments have

staggering numbers at the moment; therefore, it is important to brainstorm the specific needs of the community and to help the city engage in future discussions of challenges. He stated that it is key that the Task Force be able to tell the Legislature what the explicit needs are for the County.

Ms. Smith asked what the restrictions of Sunshine Law would be. Lee County Attorney, Richard Wesch, stated that members of the Recovery Task Force are bound by Sunshine Law. Two or more members of the RTF in their advisory role should avoid conversations about items that matter are known or foreseeable to come before for this body. He directed any specific questions to the Lee County Attorney's office or members should consult their respective city's attorney. If members wish to designate an alternate, they could speak with that alternate within the Sunshine Law parameters. Any other questions should be directed to their city attorney as Sunshine Law inquiries are specifically fact driven.

Mr. Corrie asked about the level of authority of the RTF and if that would have to be cleared with each member's respective city council. Chair Ruane answered that this is treated similarly to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Tourist Development Council (TDC) in the context that each Member is a representative of their city or in a larger advisory role. Chair Ruane made it clear that the RTF was an opportunity to have each city be represented. Mr. Wesch added that any limitations on members would be placed by their jurisdiction and not by the Task Force.

Mr. Persons raised the point that the use of educational buildings and schools as shelters should be a topic included in the Infrastructure Branch. He stated that the school system took the brunt of the community need for shelters during hurricanes. Since schools are back in session, shelters need to be revisited. He then offered the schools as potential meeting places for the RTF to convene.

Ms. Smith raised the topic of elder care, nursing homes, and special needs needing to be included in the Health and Human Services Branch. Chair Ruane emphasized that special needs groups need to be identified to make sure they are provided resources and hospitality needed to address their needs.

Mr. Gunter stated that the first task of the Branches should be to develop priorities which should be brought back to RTF for feedback.

Mr. Allers raised the topic of shared resources and how the county should work to reopen parks and beaches, and how the county and municipalities should consider adjoining properties.

Chair Ruane stated that he participated in a roundtable with Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nunez the previous week to identify areas in each Branch. He stated that as the Task Force identifies things that have a high priority for the Branches, it can be brought forward to the Board.

Mr. Caldwell discussed the long-term fiscal impacts on the tax base and revenue of municipalities. He raised the question of if the community at large wanted the fishing industry to be a long-term effort. He then said the unincorporated areas must be considered too. Chair Ruane asked Mr. Caldwell to recirculate the list to Members of areas broken down and the damage down in each area. Mr. Caldwell said that the initial report had a total destruction between 10,000 to 15,000 parcels, which now stands at 6,000 to 7,000.

Mr. Corrie said many people in his jurisdiction have questions about how to deal with flood insurance claims, tax returns, etc. He said these kinds of issues are what people are concerned about since they impact them directly. Mr. Corrie said there needs to be a focus on the individual needs and the global needs of the community and region. He asked the Branch to address how we can help the citizens resolve their flood insurance claims, how to get loans from the Small Business Administration (SBA) to cover businesses, and how to get the people the right tax information. He said this should be more at the granular level to help get residents and businesses back in shape. Chair Ruane said that insurance might be an issue that pertains to people on a larger scale, especially during Special Session; there is a need to discuss insurance amongst the different municipalities. He said this was an opportunity for the Branches to identify things that need stronger advocacy about, so a letter can be written as a unified voice pertaining to the issues. Chair Ruane also stated that there should be sub-branches to help the community. Mr. Mazany said that the survey would be a way for the voices of the communities to be heard, and a way to identify what the trending topics are so the Task Force can better advocate.

Mr. Persons raised the issue of housing; teachers being still displaced since the Hurricane. He stated that it is hard to recruit and retain teachers due to the difficulty of housing. Chair Ruane urged each Member to collaborate with Ms. Shannon and Mr. Mazany about the evolving situations.

Ms. Smith asked if the Task Force would be taking up action items at the meetings. Chair Ruane said the Task Force would create a list of priorities that Hagerty and the Collaboratory will review to maximize potential funding sources.

6. Public Comment

Chair Ruane opened the floor for Public Comment. The Task Force received one public comment from Mr. Sean Williams.

Mr. Williams seconded Mr. Persons' issue of housing being a priority. He stated that it had been a crisis before the hurricane, and now it is in a state of emergency. Mr. Williams said that the housing issue is in multiple areas such as healthcare and education; we need to have housing to have a workforce and economic growth.

7. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Chair Ruane thanked the Members of the Task Force for their work. He urged the Members to continue to collaborate on the different issues and stated that it is a long-term recovery, but the County will recover. The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 A.M. on February 27, 2023.