

Housing Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

12:30 PM– 2:30 PM | NOVEMBER 7, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET,
SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 12:30 PM on November 7, 2023, Jon Romine, facilitator, convened the Housing Branch meeting. The following Members were present:

- Marion Briggs
- Richard Durling
- Chris Simoneau
- Dan O’Berski
- Marcia Davis
- Lee Ford
- Amy Yearsley

County Liaison:

- Tim Gillmore

Facilitators and Branch Support:

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

Introductions

Mr. Romine provided an update on the work of the Recovery Task Force and the Recovery and Resilience Planning process.

Upcoming Community Engagement

Mr. Romine summarized the upcoming community engagement series regarding the Initiatives of the *ResilientLee Recovery and Resilience Plan*.

Updated Initiative Review

The Support Team introduced each Initiative for discussion with Branch Members.

Supporting Regional Housing Coordination

- Members suggested making the objective action oriented and removing extraneous language.
- Mr. O'Berski suggested that the key considerations section mentions a gap analysis that is already documented and needed. Members suggested updating the language with identified needs and types of housing needed from the Housing Coalition with Collaboratory.
- Members suggested using the term multi-jurisdictional as Lee County is not a region.
- Mr. Durling suggested that the Initiative is focused on future coordination regionally with building departments and housing and resiliency. He also mentioned cross referencing the Strengthening Emergency Logistical Resources Initiative.
- Members suggested listing out the barriers to affordability with data so that reducing regulations is the method to reduce costs and streamline the process (i.e., parking, landscape, setbacks, and impact fees).
- Members suggested simplifying the stakeholders list to make sure that individual organizations are not lost. The private side is missing many home builders, construction, and building associations (Construction and Real Estate Associations). One potential method to engage the interested stakeholders could be self-engagement.
- Members suggested adding housing authorities to the stakeholder list.
- Members discussed that Lee County is listed too often in the stakeholder list and Municipal Departments should be listed.

Exploring Mixed-Use Development Opportunities

- Members suggested considering that common barriers to mixed-use and higher density housing are parking and transit challenges which can defeat the purpose of mixed-use communities. They suggested using strategies for compact communities and mixed-use development.

- Members suggested that the employment centers listed are not the best example. Members suggested the use of geographic areas, such as the intersections of Summerland and Cypress or Colonial and I-75, to describe employment center corridors.
- Members suggested using site-specific industry terminology instead of calling out specific industries such as shrimping.

Identifying Buyout Opportunities

- Members suggested focusing on the action in the objective statement.
- Members suggested considering other options for buyouts through land trusts, more than just the local government, including the role of the private sector.
- Members suggested switching residential and commercial in the summary statement to emphasize residential. The purpose of this is to solidify the description of commercial buyouts to clarify and clearly describe the focus of the Initiative.
- Members suggested including trailer parks and the potential buyouts for those specific types of properties.

Supporting Housing Repair- Reconstruction Program Initiatives

- Members suggested generalizing the descriptions when discussing Low to Moderate Income (LMI) to include the appropriate income restrictions and qualifications based on the funding sources used. This allows for flexibility for philanthropic groups to be involved.

Promoting Housing Development Programs

- Members suggested including the word 'gap' in front of financial in the later part of the summary statement.
- Members suggested a softer regional approach as municipalities often do have their own approach.
- Members discussed the Florida Building Code. Members suggested that information on higher strength materials should be removed as the standards are already required and would directly affect affordability.
- Members suggested that the Impact section include language on the upgrade of existing affordable housing stock. Members suggested bringing the current stock up to code as well as upgrading existing housing units to increase the total number of units available. Members stated that new affordable housing units will use higher strength materials and that all new buildings are up to code.

Expanding Housing Financing and Legal Service Programs

- Members discussed legal services as a subset of housing counseling and literacy.
- Member suggested editing the title to “Expanding Housing Literacy and Education.”
- Members discussed edits to remove the word “unlawful” in the terminology on evictions.
- Members suggested including the words “navigate and understand” when discussing the bankruptcy process instead of declaring bankruptcy.
- Members suggested the stakeholder list reflect Housing Authorities. not just the Lee County Housing Authority.

Coordinating Housing Programs and Services and Enhancing Outreach

- Members suggested that the summary statement and description should be broader than just “disaster”.
- Members suggested that the Initiative should include language from the Hurricane Ian Housing Connection Services Program.
- Members suggested considering that Hurricane Ian exacerbated existing problems.
- Members discussed existing educational programs that are common but not well known or used.
- Members suggested adding education about licensed and unlicensed contractor fraud to the Key Considerations section.

Regional Resilience Planning

- Members suggested including the work currently in progress by Bright Community Trust to identify areas.

Public Comment

Marsha Ellis suggested having more vertical parking structures. She suggested considering stormwater and multi-use spaces for natural areas. She commented that issues with the proposed buyout policy remain and that condominiums are missing from the conversation to move people into homeownership. She suggested that housing burden and insurance costs are creating additional challenges.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 2:38 PM.