

Natural Resources Branch

Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM | SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 9:00 AM on September 21, 2023, Dan DeLisi, Branch Lead, convened the Natural Resources Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- Dan DeLisi, Branch Lead
- Justin Mahon
- James Evans
- Joanne Ribble
- Holly Milbrandt
- Katie Larsen (on behalf of Lee Health) (non-voting)
- Maya Robert
- Kate Gooderham

County Liaison

- Phil Gillogly

Facilitator and Branch Support:

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

Introductions

Mr. Romine provided an update on the work of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and the Recovery and Resiliency Plan (Plan) process, which included collecting and analyzing the

Branches' feedback so far on the Initiatives. Ms. Phillips reviewed the process for members and stakeholders to provide feedback on the Initiatives.

Overview of Recent Recovery Task Force Efforts

Mr. Romine provided a summary of the One-on-One meetings with the Recovery Task Force Members and their leadership teams. Ms. Phillips provided an overview of the feedback and development of the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Branch Initiative Feedback Summary

Mr. Heere introduced the initiative, NR01: Water Quality and Green Infrastructure. Mr. Romine introduced the Branch member feedback collected for that Initiative. Mr. Newton introduced the County feedback collected for that Initiative. Members discussed the comments related to water quality and stormwater management. Mr. Romine mentioned ongoing stormwater management for the railroad right of way and the importance of that in Bonita and Estero. Mr. DeLisi suggested that stormwater is independent of water quality and that flood control remain under the purview of this Branch. Mr. Gillogly stated that Lee County Department of Transportation handles more of the gray infrastructure and Lee County Natural Resources handles the natural areas.

Members discussed that flood control and management may need to be separate initiatives. Ms. Phillips reviewed the purpose of the Branches and strategic planning across different subject matters. Members discussed potential working groups to accomplish the implementation of the Plan. Mr. Romine described the consolidation plan for the Natural Resources Branch Initiatives to incorporate flood management. Mr. Evans asked how conflicts could be resolved throughout the editing process across Branches. Mr. Romine described the feedback process for the Recovery Task Force. Members discussed the feedback on potential implementation steps of the Initiative. Members expressed that for infrastructure Initiatives, natural resources need to be considered with flood and water management. Mr. DeLisi supported a focus group for cross coordination of jurisdictions on natural resources. Ms. Milbrandt stated that natural resources components should be incorporated from the start to recognize opportunities for nature-based solutions.

The Support Team introduced the initiative NR02: Community Outreach and Education. Mr. Newton described the feedback and position of the County. Mr. Evans stated that the economic benefits of natural resources should be included when estimating the value of natural resources. Mr. DeLisi stated that the local governments should partner with existing non-profit organizations for research on policies. Members discussed the historical

challenges of education and outreach in Lee County. Members suggested that in parks, natural resources should be better integrated throughout to educate the public about the value of natural resources. Members suggested that municipalities can work with non-profits to help create additional opportunities for research and the education.

The Support Team introduced Initiative, NR03: Wildlife Protection. Members discussed critical wildlife habitat and pushing for protection of critical habitats. This gives broader protection for uplands, wetlands, and habitat to protect wildlife in general. Members suggested that invasive and non-native species management should be included in the role of native wildlife protection.

The Support Team introduced initiative NR04: Coastal Protection. Ms. Gooderham suggested that the Coastal Advisory Council (CAC) is focused on beaches and suggested expanding the role of that Council. Mr. Evans stated there is a nexus between coastal protection and the Conservation 20/20 Program. Mr. Gollogly said that the CAC mainly deals with beaches rather than mangrove forests. Members discussed the challenges with land use changes and mapping flood control. Members suggested that additional land development considerations for protection of coastal barriers could be the method to identify strategic areas for restoration of coastal and natural habitats. Mr. Evans stated that could be a method to restore natural areas that are already owned by the County that serve as natural barriers. Members discussed dunes and the ability to expand protection and restoration for dunes, like the County's current efforts for coastal uplands.

The Support Team introduced Initiative, NR05: Land Management and the feedback summary associated with this Initiative. Members noted that a holistic perspective on these Initiatives includes flood plain acquisition, the impact on water quality, and potential environmental issues. Members discussed the Conservation 20/20 Program and parks. Mr. Gollogly stated that the potential buyout of certain areas (typically in floodplains) as well as the characteristics of the built environment are considerations across the Infrastructure and Natural Resources Branches.

The Support Team introduced initiative NR06: Debris Management and the feedback received about this Initiative. Members agreed that this is a planning and capacity issue for debris management.

The Support Team introduced initiative, NR07: Multi-Use Trails and the feedback summary associated with this Initiative. Members agreed that this is not a natural resources issue. Members discussed that community outreach and education also play a role in this.

The Support Team introduced initiative NR08: Economic Impact and Access to Natural resources and the feedback summary. Members discussed that Initiatives can become

powerful by including education on the economic value and the benefits of natural resources. If new regulations are put in place, the economic value can provide the need and justification of value of natural resources. There is a component of these natural resources that are on private lands and allowing increased intensity where there are natural resources that add value. Members discussed projects and the trajectory of those in the planning process.

Initiative Consolidation

Mr. Romine described the recommendations for consolidation for the Natural resources. Ms. Robert stated that water quality and the design of infrastructure is the key to water quality, and there needs to be a strong component of natural resources with the vision of resilience for stormwater management. Members stated the importance of stormwater and the role of natural resources in this Plan. Ms. Roberts provided background on the structure of the City of Cape Coral for managing stormwater and public works. Mr. Gollogly provided a background on the County's role in flood management and water quality. Members stated that these are separate initiatives. Members agreed that water quality and water quantity should remain in the natural resources.

Questions and Next Steps

Members reviewed next steps including that they will be notified as soon as possible on the next scheduled meeting date. Mr. DeLisi requested that natural resources members be able to engage the RTF members to brief them on the Initiatives.

Public Comment

No request for public comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the Members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 10:42 AM.