

Lee County Recovery Task Force Attainable & Resilient Housing Workshop

Session 3 – Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM – 4:30 PM | JUNE 9, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PERMITTING

Call to Order

On June 9, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Jon Romine and Terry Ware, convened the Attainable & Resilient Housing Workshop: Permitting at 2:30 PM with the following panelists present:

- Jason Smalley
- Amy Yearsley
- Audra Ennis
- Craig Chandler
- Jacqueline Genson
- Frank Wells

The following Branch members were present:

- Marion Briggs
- Gary Griffin
- Chris Simoneau
- Lee Ford
- Dan O'Berski
- Marco Villalobos
- Stephanie Wardein
- Jennifer Hagen

Workshop Topic Discussion

Mr. Ware asked how well the permitting process was working before. He asked if there were additional problems with the new restrictions. The answers were as followed:

- Permitting issues were known prior to Hurricane Ian;
- Cape Coral transitioned to a new permitting system in 2022, which was a challenge;
- There were an unprecedented number of permits that were being processed, following Hurricane Ian;
- Staff was hired to help review permits, including contractors; and
- There have been difficulties in filling positions.

Mr. Ware asked how to push the envelope and be proactive. The suggestions were as followed:

- Retain staff and lessen the overturning of staff;
- Workforce housing;
- Salary for hiring employees;
- Turning to technology to help with automation and site inspections;
- Understand the costs associated with permitting; and
- Having all the municipalities (and potentially the state governments) use uniform software.

The facilitators asked how artificial intelligence (AI) could play a role in the permitting process. The panelists stated the following:

- AI can help but will not solve the permitting process;
- Funding can help with the transition to new software for permitting;
- AI can help expedite the process and can help with plan reviews; and
- AI is in its infancy, which can be negative.

There were concerns about the current ordinances that do not grant staff administrative authorities that could help with the initial streaming process. Participants stated that the cost is getting higher, therefore opportunities are going away.

Mr. Romine asked what permits could be streamlined, and if it could be a sector strategy for the workforce. Mr. Griffin suggested working together to make it more consistent and easier for universal permitting.

Ms. Yearsley said it was worth discussing how municipalities permit different things and identify why they differ. Participants stated that there has been a lack of uniformity, but it could be built out.

Mr. Ware asked if there were any impacts as it relates to multifamily housing. The panelists stated the following:

- The task is to look at streamlining permitting;
- There is a new opportunity to look at different codes;
- Looking at cutting the red tape to move permitting forward faster; and
- Identifying a regional permitting process.

Ms. Briggs asked how to look at affordable housing and help them push through permitting applications.

Mr. Smally stated that many of the reasons why permits are turned down are due to incomplete packaging. He shared his concern that not enough pre-meetings with communities are being done, which could help with submitting packaging. Additionally, he stated that there needs to be a regional way to consolidate information.

Mr. Romine asked what the investment would look like as a County that could offset the issues. The panelists suggested the following:

- A regional checklist of the community needs;
- Pre-meetings to ensure packages are put together correctly (including signatures on the correct page); and
- Having a government liaison or someone who is familiar with the planning/zoning/regulation permitting process from the developer's side.

Ms. Hagen stated that Sanibel has been making differentiations from silos to take a more holistic approach. Training and having staff that had multi-understanding could make the process go by smoother.

Mr. Griffin shared his concerns about Fire Marshall officials slowing down the process due to the lack of accountability. It was also shared that people who do not have a background in this matter can slow down the process and create a bottleneck.

Mr. Smalley proposed a discussion of the pros and cons of concurrent reviews at a staff level and suggested a hybrid approach. He also proposed an ability to review flood codes and sustainable damage analysis, on an application, where information is centrally located. Mr. Smalley stated that this is an opportunity for retailers to come together and refine the process to make it less stressful and streamlined.

Mr. Bonafilia said it is important to think about local permitting regarding modular building. He asked if there were lessons learned from the modular industry and third-party permitting.

Mr. Ware asked how to deal with the issue of modular homes and resiliency. Mr. Romine stated that most of the loss of workforce housing was in the coastal communities, therefore solutions need to be thought of.

Mr. Griffin raised the point that mobile homes do not fare well, but manufactured homes do.

Ms. Genson stated that the idea of a uniform process sounds appealing, but there are different nuances because of zoning regulations, draining regulations, and flood ordinances.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Marshal Ellis stated that the idea of regional planning and permitting consistency makes sense. However, there are differences in permitting due to the geography of the different regions. She also suggested that permitting reviews be remote to increase the permitting process.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM on June 9, 2023.